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THE LAND OF PARDONS



A BRETON VILLAGE

LAND OF PARDON

BY
ANATOLE LE BRAZ

TRANSLATED BY
FRANCES M. GOSTLING

WITH 12 ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR
BY T. C. GOTCH
AND 40 OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW AND CHEAPER ISSUE

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TO
THE REVERED MEMORY
OF
MY MOTHER

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BY T. C. GOTCH

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LA BRETAGNE

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

A LITTLE wayside junction, and an hour to wait in the pouring rain! Not a pleasant prospect, you will agree, and yet . . . well, I will tell you about it.

We were on our way to the Pardon of Saint Yves, "The Pardon of the Poor," at Tréguier, and the connection we ought to have made at Saint Brieuc had not proved satisfactory. So there we were under the dripping roof, with nothing to do for the next sixty long minutes, but turn over the picture post-cards and papers on the poor little stall.

The post-cards were the worst we had yet come across; so were the papers, which is saying a good deal, and we were just turning away, when my eye fell on a small volume on the second shelf. It was standing between "One Hundred Ways to cook Eggs" and a very objectionable novel that I had sampled the day before. Why I took it down I cannot say; it was in the usual paper cover, with nothing to distinguish it from the books above and below. Perhaps its title caught my eye, "Au Pays des Pardons;" perhaps a desire arose to know something of this Brittany, where every Englishman has travelled, and yet of which he knows nothing but the name.

Paying the woman her three francs-fifty, I retired to

the driest seat I could find, and began to cut the pages . . . I always think that one gets the truest idea of a book in those glimpses caught as the knife slits up the folds of the paper. These first impressions resemble the intuitive likes and dislikes that we feel for fresh acquaintances, and are seldom mistaken.

I liked my book before I had cut through the introduction, I loved it as I finished the Pardon of the Poor. The train came and carried me off, still cutting and dipping, now engrossed by King Gralon's pathetic death scene, now smiling at the quaint picture of poor Ronan and that virago Kébèn. . . . Gradually the wet landscape I had found so dull began to take a new aspect. Those paths through the soaking meadows might be "Sentiers" through which the Death-cart made its way; that old woman, was she Mònik with the coin in her shoe, that she limped along so painfully? and see! surely there goes Mabik Rémond, the chimney-sweep, "The blackbird of Saint Yves!" I searched each field of wheat for one of those tiny sanctuaries so dear to the Breton heart, and even the dismal, darkening sky was more endurable when I noticed how truly it was called "Slate Grey!" Many times had I run through this Brittany, yet now I was seeing it for the first time. Here was Armorica, not the Brittany of the tourist or the holiday-maker, but the true "Country of Pardons," to be seen only through Breton eyes.

As soon as I found myself settled in the big old room at the Lion d'Or at Tréguier, I set to work putting the beautiful thing into English, not because then I had any idea of publishing it, but for the mere delight it gave me, and because I wanted to read of

those sunsets, those "Awakenings of the Ocean," in my own dear tongue.

Well, it is done at last, and my pleasant task is over. It has been indeed a labour of love, this close companionship with one of Brittany's greatest poets.

May you find as much pleasure in reading "The Land of Pardons" as I have taken in translating Mons. Anatole le Braz' "Au Pays des Pardons."

FRANCES M. GOSTLING

I should like to add that my thanks are due to Mr. Fernand Chrestien, of Balliol College, Oxford, for providing four of the photographs to the last Pardon, "The Pardon of the Sea."

WORTHING, 1905.



A BRETON PARDON

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

IT is scarcely needful to tell my readers that this "Land of Pardons," through which I propose to lead him, is Brittany. "La Bretagne Bretonnante," as it is sometimes called, or, to be very correct, "Armorica." Scarcely less superfluous would it be, I imagine, to define the word "Pardon." Every one has seen a Pardon. It is impossible to travel for a week in Brittany, during the summer, without falling into the midst of one of these local festivals. Seen thus casually by the passer-by, these gatherings are not very interesting. They are usually held near some old chapel, scarcely to be distinguished from the cottages around, save for its little bell-tower. Sometimes it nestles in the hollow of a wooded ravine, sometimes stands on the summit of a barren, wind-swept moor, and there you will find a crowd of people in their Sunday clothes, coming and going, in a quiet, monotonous fashion, arms hanging or crossed on their breasts, without a gleam of enthusiasm or a smile of pleasure.

Some, seated in the little inn, will be singing and making a great deal of noise, but evidently actuated rather by conscientious motives than lightness of heart.

Beggars are swarming everywhere, sordid, covered with vermin and ulcers, pitiable, repulsive.

In the graveyard, true field of Death, humped with mossy hillocks, a blind man, twisted and bent as the trunk of a yew tree, shrieks forth a mournful dirge in an unknown tongue.

The young couples, who ought to be chattering of love, wander about scarcely exchanging a word, only teasing one another awkwardly and shyly.

After assisting at the Pardon of La Clarté, near Perros, a friend of mine said to me, "Do you know, I decidedly prefer your Bretons when they are not amusing themselves; they are so much more lively." But then he made a mistake in thinking that they came to the Pardon to amuse themselves!

Le Goffic writes with regard to the Pardons:—

"They have remained unchanged for over two hundred years, and nowhere else will you find anything so deliciously obsolete. They have no resemblance to other festivals. They are not pretexts for feasting, like the 'Flemmis Kermesses,' neither are they revels like the Paris fairs. No! their attraction comes from a higher source. They are the last vestiges of the ancient Feasts of the Dead, and there is little laughter at them, though much prayer. . . ."

It would be difficult to give a truer idea of a Pardon. Deep religious thoughtfulness hovers over the assembly. Every one looks grave and reverent, and the greater part of the day is given over to devotional exercises. Long, long hours are passed before the homely image of the saint; on their knees the

worshippers make the tour of the granite trough that was his bed, his boat, his tomb ; they go to drink of his fountain, over which always rises a little building of the same age as the chapel. The water of these same fountains is in great request, and is supposed to have certain health-giving properties.

Only toward evening, when Vespers are over, do the festivities begin. And what simple pleasures they are ; how innocent, how primitive ! The good folk flock together in the shade of the walnut trees, on the green sward, beneath the spreading elms. And there, under the eyes of the girls, seated demurely on the surrounding slopes, the youths challenge one another to wrestle, to race, to jump with the long pole, while the old men look on and applaud. Last of all the dance unfolds its mystic circles, serious yet lively, with an indescribable harmony and simplicity in its rhythm, that reminds one of its sacred origin.

The home-goings in the dusk are exquisite. With the freshness of twilight, just when the stars begin to kindle in the slate-grey sky, the crowd separates into groups, and every one begins to move homeward. How soft is the peace that hovers over everything ! Young men take their sweethearts by the little finger, and wander off with them side by side. *He* has grown bold, and *she* no longer blushes, for the mystery of the twilight is upon them, and invites to confidence.

As they near a farm, all break into song, by way of announcing their coming, joining in unison in some ballad, bought during the afternoon from the stall. Other groups answer back from afar, and soon from all quarters an alternating chant arises, that little by

little dies away into the great silence of the drowsy plains, and ceases with the last tolling of the Angelus.

Monsieur Luzel has expressed the charm of these festivals in a "Sône" which has not yet been published, and of which I here give a verse or two:—

I

We were passing through fields, and flowering meadows, and woods where the birds sang loudly.

Before me at a little distance walked Jénovéfa Rozel, the prettiest maid in all Brittany, and dressed, too—ah! how she was dressed! She looked like an angel.

"Good day, pretty Jéno. Jesu! how lovely you are looking! Promise me the first dance, La Ronde."

"Thank you, Alanik. If I am neatly dressed, it is not because of the dance. But there! we all know what a tease you are."

"Ah, well, at all events I am ready to bet a hundred almonds that I shall soon see you dancing round Jolory the fiddler, giving your hand to Gabik, you little flower of love! But never mind, Gabik is a fine lad, a very fine lad. Nay, do not blush, little one." . . .

II

The procession is forming. The bells ring out in such volleys that the tower trembles, and the beam creaks with the strain of the ringing. See, here comes the great banner from out the porch. Who will be carrying it, I wonder?

Ah! Robert le Manac'h it is! He is the strongest

of all the young men in the country-side. Now he makes the banner salute three times. What a fine fellow he is! More than one girl fixes her eyes on him.

The second banner is carried by Gabik. He is looking on every side for Jénovéfa, his little sweetheart. . . . Then follow a crowd of girls, pretty, ravishingly pretty, dressed all in white, each carrying a candle. . . .

And all along the route are young lads and pretty girls, standing on the slopes among the flowers—flowers of hawthorn, flowers of broom. Even from the branches of the trees children hang in clusters. . . .

Out in the open the rector with his own hand sets light to the pile of gorse.

"The fire! The bonfire!"

And every one shouts together, "Iou! Iou!"

And now, now comes the fiddler's turn.

III

Jolory, mounted on his hogshead, summons the young men to the "Aubade." How the hearts of the girls flutter at the call! Look! What eagerness! In spite of the dust, how they leap; how excited they are!

The "Sonneur" can do no more. Let him drink as he may, his breath will fail him.

"Play, 'Sonneur,' play. Drink and play. Keep on playing all the time."

IV

But where is Jénovéfa? I cannot see her anywhere. And Gabik, too! he is missing. Ah! this

makes me very anxious, for I do not want to lose my hundred almonds. . . .

But there is the blind singer! . . . Perhaps I shall find them listening to some new song about two young love-sick hearts. . . . No! . . . The old man is singing a terribly sad lament. It has to do with a ship lost at sea in stormy weather. . . . Let us look further, further! . . . Here is Iouenn Gorvel, stretched full length among the spearwort, as tipsy as a pig. . . . Here is Job Kerival. . . .

"Tell me, have you seen Jénovéfa Rozel?"

"Indeed I have. I met her just now going down there. I expect she was on her way to the chapel to take leave of the saint."

"Was she alone?"

"No, no; not she. Why, her sweetheart Gabik was with her, to be sure. And how pleased he was! How pretty she looked!"

. . . They are no longer at the chapel. . . . Ah, my pretty Jénovéfa, I shall find you directly, and with you your Gabik! . . .

"Good day, friend Margaret. . . . How much a hundred are your nuts?"

"My good gentleman, I will let you have them for three reals. As a rule I sell them at eighteen sous the hundred; nuts have gone up so in price, that it is difficult to make a living. Times are indeed hard."

. . . And now homewards—homewards! All the road is full of people returning from the Pardon. . . . Ah, the laughter! The laughter and the songs! . . .

"Alms for the poor! for the poor old man who can see no better at midday than at midnight!" . . .

It is old blind Robert Kerbastiou, who has so often sung me "gwerzes" and "Sônes."

"See, here are two sous in your bowl, poor old fellow."

"The blessing of God be upon you, and may you live many years!"

V

Ah, the lovely, lovely evening! The shrill sound of the "Biniou" comes to me, mingled with the perfume of flowers. . . . The sun sinks behind the hill, and far off in the distance they are singing the gwerz of Kloarek Laoudour.

Ha! ha! and who have we here under the beech tree? Who but Jénovéfa, if I am not mistaken, and Gabik, too, seated beside her?

"The wind is quite fresh up here. . . . And when you go in late, Jéno, you know how mother scolds. . . . Ah, well, here is something to put her in a good humour. Give the almonds to the children, to little brother and sister, to father and mother. For I have lost my wager, Jénovéfa, have I not? and I pay willingly. May God in heaven bless your love to the very end. Nay, my dear, do not blush so. Before three months are over, the rector will be marrying you in church."

That is a Breton Pardon. Who knows one, knows all. And they are innumerable; every country oratory has its own. I could cite some communes that have on their land as many as twenty-two chapels—tiny chapels, it is true, and half underground, with roof scarce visible above the soil. There are some like that of Saint Gily

of Plouaret, that disappear in the midst of the corn when the ears are high. And these are by no means the least frequented, let me tell you. There is a Breton proverb that says it will not do to judge of the power of a saint by the size of his church. Many of these sanctuaries fall into ruins, for the clergy do not always give them the care they need. Indeed, some priests are rather suspicious of the vague devotion that goes on in their midst, penetrated as it still is by pagan rites. But as long as there remains the least scrap of wall covered with ivy and brambles, the good folks of the neighbourhood continue to go there in procession on the day of the festival. The Pardon long survives the destruction of the sanctuary.

Last summer, as I was going from Spézet to Château-neuf-du-Faou, I saw a great concourse assembled on the edge of the canal, at the spot where the road crosses the Aulne.

"What are all those people doing?" asked I of the conductor.

"It is the Pardon of Saint Iguinou," he answered.

I searched with my eyes for the chapel, but in vain. Only, there was at the bottom of the meadow a fountain, which fell in a long hanging shroud, and a little above it on the flank of the hill, in a natural excavation or niche, an antique figure, without date, almost without face, a staff in one hand, and in the other a bouquet of freshly gathered foxgloves. No religious emblem, not even the shadow of a priest. Nevertheless the solemnity was most impressive. It was, so to speak, the faithful themselves officiating. . . .

One can never understand what an important

position the Pardon of his parish or district occupies in the mind of the Breton, unless one is born of the race and has known the legends from childhood.

As a little one he is led to the Pardon in his beautiful best clothes, and the old folks seem like fairies who bathe his face in the fountain, so that the power of the sacred water may be to him as a suit of diamond armour.

Grown a youth, it is here that he ties the knot of friendship with some pretty one, beside whom, not so very long ago, he sat, a mere child, at catechism. Lately she has increased in grace as he in vigour, and now he engages himself to her, giving himself over entirely, without set phrases, in a furtive clasping of hands, in a look.

All the dearest and most sacred emotions of his life are connected with this poor house of prayer, with the mossy enclosure planted with elms or beeches, with the narrow horizon bounded by a hawthorn hedge, and with the mystical atmosphere perfumed by incense.

When at last he grows old, it is to his Pardon that he comes to watch the joy of the young, and to taste, before leaving this world, that short rest which the good genius of the place, the tutelary saint of his clan, has prepared for him.

And here, I think, I should make special mention of these lesser cults, precisely because no reference will be accorded them in the body of the book.

Among the multitude of Breton sanctuaries, some enjoy a celebrity which spreads far beyond the limits of the hamlet, extending perhaps over the entire country. Every one for thirty leagues around goes on pilgrimage to them, and it is a popular belief that every one must

hear Mass in them at least once in life, or incur the risk of eternal damnation. They are not, as one would expect, town churches, handsome buildings of sumptuous aspect, but modest oratories differing but little from those of which we have already spoken. Nothing, save the much-used threshold and wealth of ex-voto offerings on the walls, marks them out for the attention of the passer-by. The saints who are venerated in these places have no speciality ; they cure from all evils. They are appealed to as final authorities, for they are believed to be all-powerful. The Almighty only moves in their way and by their advice. "If they say 'Yes,' it is yes ; if they say 'No,' it is no !"

All the year round they have visitors, and the roads that lead to their "houses" are never deserted. People resort to them whatever the weather may be, "even when it freezes enough to make the bones of the dead to shiver." Until a short time ago, some sixteen or seventeen thousand persons used annually to attend the Pardon of Saint Servais in a recess of the mountains of Aré, on the skirts of the forest of Duault. Thither they came from the three bishoprics of Tréguier, Quimper, and Vannes. Servais, whom the Bretons call Gelvest, or Gelvest ar Pihan (Gelvest the Little), is invoked as protector of the young crops. He insures them against the cold of winter and the white frosts of early spring. His Pardon takes place on the thirteenth of May. Until a few years ago this poor sanctuary of the mountains was celebrated for a warlike procession that was held after Vespers on the eve of the festival. From the most distant parishes the pilgrims came, the men on horseback, the women huddled together in heavy carts. Instead of

the peeled rod, usual and peaceful emblem of the pilgrim, these rough labourers brandished the *penn-baz* of holly or of oak, iron-headed, formidable as the prehistoric club. It was fastened to the right wrist by a little thong of leather. And now I will hand over the account to old Naic the story-teller, who went seven times from Quimper to Saint Servais barefoot.

"We started in several bands, and on nearing the chapel we found the Gwénédez, or people of Vannes. They were our most ferocious foes. Every one waited for Vespers ranged in two camps, the Gwénédez on one bank of the stream that skirts the churchyard, we on the other, and there we stood glaring at each other with evil eyes.

"At sound of the vesper bell the great doors opened, and we all streamed into church. At the far end of the nave could be seen the great banner, its staff passed through a ring near the balustrade of the choir. Not far from it was a wooden stretcher, and upon this stood the little figure of the saint—Sant Gelvest ar Pihan. There is a new one every year; the same would not serve twice, for it is regularly torn in pieces.

"Now the Magnificat is entoned.

"Then at once all the *penn-baz* are in the air. After each verse there is a sound of 'Dig-a-drak, dig-a-drak;' the church is full of a hideous turmoil of staves clashing against each other. The people of Cornouailles cry—

"'Throw off the frost! Throw off the frost!
Oats and wheat to the Cornouaillais!'

"The Vannetais reply—

"'Throw off the frost!
Oats and wheat and the black corn to the Vannetais!'

"Meanwhile a strong young fellow has clutched

the banner, hanging on its eighteen-foot staff, and two others lay hold of the stretcher, to which the figure of the little saint is fastened. Then, between the Gwénédis who are massed on the left, and the Cornouaillais on the right, advances the Rector of Duault, very pale, for the terrible moment is at hand. The banner stoops to pass under the archway of the door, and there is a moment of silence. Then suddenly a clamour breaks forth, a furious yelling hurled from thousands and thousands of throats—

“‘Scatter the frost ! Scatter the frost !’

“And so the conflict of the *penn-baz* begins. The great staves rise and fall, they whirl round and round, describing large bloody circles, and thrashing unmercifully everything that comes in their way.

“The rector and his choristers have fled to the sacristy, and it is just a question of who is to remain master of the banner and the little wooden statue.

“As to the women, they are no less savage than the men, only in place of clubs, they use their nails and teeth.

“I remember one year particularly. The Cornouaillais had triumphed, and there had been a perfect hurricane of blows ; arms were broken, heads were smashed, and on the tombs of the churchyard, sat men vomiting blood from the top of their lungs.

“As for the saint, he had long ago been reduced to fragments.

“‘Pick up the chips in your aprons !’ said the men to their wives.

“Only the banner remained intact. As a last effort, the Vannetais made a fierce assault to take it from us ; but they were victoriously driven back, and retired

bearing their wounded, from whom the jolting of the carts drew forth groans of pain.

"For our part, we carried the banner back to the church, singing a song of thanksgiving; and that year in Cornouailles the straw bent under the weight of the corn."

So original a Pardon as the foregoing deserves to have a place in this volume, and I give it the more willingly because I was born in this corner of the mountains, in an old house almost adjoining the chapel. Indeed, one of my earliest memories is of seeing my mother, with her own delicate hands, applying her secret remedies to a string of wounded people.

But the *fête* exists no longer. The civil and diocesan authorities united in proclaiming a kind of interdict against it, and the sacred battles in honour of Gelvest ar Pihan are ended.

The old people of the country will tell you that the agricultural depression is due to their abolition. It seems as though the labourers of the three bishoprics have lost their Palladium since people have given up disputing for the possession of the banner of Saint Servais.

The festivals of Brittany may be divided under four heads, which in my opinion form so many distinct episodes, and which, taken together, make up the religious life of the Armorican Bretons. I have tried to describe them from nature, truthfully. I have seen most of these Pardons many times, and my wish is to bring them before you, such as they appeared to me, in all their worn beauty, with the features peculiar to each.

I am fortunate to have seen them when I did, for

not long will they remain unchanged. Every year some alteration is taking place in the quaint customs of the old peninsula. Further on you will read what one of our poets says as to the future of these *fêtes*. Even to-day they are not as they were twenty years ago. "Les hommes-troncs," spoken of by Le Goffic, have learned the way to our most remote shrines. Around the sacred enclosures, song merchants are more and more taking the place of the ancient brotherhood of singers, and foreign brass instruments now mingle their coarse braying with the airy music of the bells.

Gravest symptom of all, new forms of worship are replacing the ancient cults, and, among the people the marvellous legends of their saints are becoming forgotten.

Therefore I have written these pages, so that if the sweet soul of the Breton Pardon should ever fade away, those who, like myself, have loved it, may here find something of its poetry and perfume.

KERFEUNTEUN, 1894.

Since six years ago I wrote the preceding lines, my little work has passed through an honourable career. Now, to-day, I am sending it forth again, with no other change but the addition of a fifth Pardon, that of Saint Jean-du-Doigt. May this new chapter receive as kind a welcome from the public as did the four others. It deserves it, if not because of the interest I have sought to instil into it, at least for its own intrinsic worth. In closing, I should like to acknowledge all that I owe to the kindness of Monsieur le Chanoine Abgrall, one of the truest and most obliging of all our learned Bretons.

PORT BLANC, 1900.



THE TOMB OF SAINT YVES AT TRÉGUIER DECORATED FOR THE PARDON

THE LAND OF PARDONS

BOOK I.—SAINT YVES

THE PARDON OF THE POOR

DEDICATED TO MONSIEUR JAMES DARMESTETER

CHAPTER I

SAINTE YVES is the latest of all our true Breton saints,* and I believe I am right in saying that he is the only one who has been canonized. He is a very great saint, and his fame has spread far and wide, beyond the limits of the province, as the fame of no other Breton has ever done. Within a year after his canonization, he had a college at Paris, in the Rue Saint Jacques, and there it stood until 1823.

During the fifteenth century a chapel was raised to him in the very heart of Rome itself, bearing the inscription: "*Divo Yvoni Trecorensi*:" and, a little later, a brotherhood of lawyers arose in the same city, calling themselves by his name, and devoting their time and

* Ewen, Euzen, or Yves H  loury was born October 7, 1253, of the noble lady Dame Azou du Quinquiz and her husband, Tanaik H  loury de Kervarzin, who, it is said, accompanied Pierre de Dreux, Duke of Brittany, to the Seventh Crusade. ("Life of Saint Yves," by l'Abb   France.)

their talents to the defence of the poor and humble. So far has the name of Yves spread, indeed, that we find altars raised to him at Angers, Chartres, Évreux, Dijon; while at Pau on one occasion we hear of a special procession held in his honour, in which the parliament took part gorgeously arrayed in red robes. At a grand audience held in Antwerp, his relics, encased in a splendid reliquary, were given to the Court to kiss. The great Rubens painted a picture of him for the University of Louvain, and a fresco by Baccio della Porta has lately been found at San Gimignano, near Pérouse, representing the holy advocate giving free advice to a client in rags.

But naturally it is in Brittany, especially in his native place Tréguier, that his memory and his worship flourish most greenly.

The winding paths leading across the fields to his chapel at Minihy are frequented all the year round by pilgrims coming to implore his help. From all the little havens of the coast they come flocking, and even from the far-off slopes of the Ménez.

One evening as I was returning from a visit to the tower of Saint Michel, that high solitary ruin which overlooks all the Trégorrois country, I was a good deal surprised to see, at a turn in the road, three small lights that flickered feebly in the gathering dusk, whilst in the midst of the great silence a sound of voices arose, very soft, very monotonous, in a long and plaintive chant.

As I approached I made out a group of women seated side by side on a heap of stones at the edge of the road. Each one held a candle in her hand, whose flame rose almost unwavering in the still night

air. I gave them "Good evening" in Breton, and they stopped their singing to ask if it were yet very far to Saint Yves. They came from Pleumeur-Bodou, and had made the journey fasting and without a break. Now they were just resting for a moment before going on. Their object was to pass the whole night praying in the church, "de faire la veillée devant le saint," as they expressed it, then, after early Mass, to return home, barefoot and fasting, even as they had come.

"Have you carried these candles, lighted as they are, all the way from Pleumeur?" I asked.

"Yes, of course we have."

"Why?"

"Because it is part of our vow."

"And what is that vow? will you tell me?" I asked curiously.

But apparently my question was indiscreet. The women looked at each other in confusion, and the eldest of the three, who had a gaunt sunburnt face like that of a wrecker, replied severely—

"It does not seem to me that you are the blessed Monsieur Saint Yves."

She rose as she spoke, making a sign to her companions, and I saw them trail off into the darkness, one by one in single file, stopping suddenly now and then, as, disturbed by the movement through the air, the flame of a candle threatened to go out, and still I heard the humming of their voices growing fainter and yet more faint, when I myself had reached Tréguier. It sounded like a swarm of bees, travelling from tree to tree into the sonorous depths of the night.

I cannot say why this particular incident stands out in my memory from a host of others belonging to the same place, unless it is because a certain atmosphere of mystery seems to surround it.

It is said in Brittany that each saint has his speciality in the way of cures. Maudez cures boils, Gonéry * fevers, Tujen, the bite of mad dogs. But Yves is, as the people say, good for everything. That is why he is so superior to all the rest. You can go to him on no matter what business. When Saint Yves has once got a thing into his head, he will see it through to the end. Such is the general conviction. And so, while in these later days the greater number of the old miracle-workers have seen their prestige wane, his has continued to increase ; it is, in fact, as an old woman said to me, " Il les dépasse tous de son bonnet carré." † He is to all Bretons, the learned man, the doctor *par excellence* ; they have an invincible faith in his knowledge, certain, moreover, that he will always employ it in their behalf. For he is not only science itself, he is also incarnate justice. He is the great lawgiver, the perfect, incorruptible judge. The most usual way in which he is represented is seated on his tribunal, between the good poor man, whose petition he is receiving, and the rich villain whose purse he refuses. It is a simple, innocent piece of symbolism. You may be sure that

* Saint Gonéry has his church and sepulchre at Plougrescent, a little north of Tréguier. The earth from his tomb is considered a cure for any kind of fever. It is sold in little muslin bags and tied round the necks of the patients. Afterwards it should be hung up in the church.—(F.M.G.)

† " He beats them all with his doctor's cap."

the good poor man represents the Breton people, that race of miserable souls, inured to trouble and hardship, the conditions of whose life have remained so precarious, and upon whom the long inheritance of suffering belonging to most of the Celtic communities has never ceased to press. Like the good poor man, the Breton holds in his hand a scroll, on which are inscribed his wrongs, his grievances, his unquenchable hope. For in spite of the cruel teaching of the past, the Breton has given up none of his old dreams, renounced none of his ideals. Starved of Justice, he has remained faithful to the religion of Righteousness. Like all races that have suffered, he comforts himself with a great messianic hope, and while waiting for the improbable day when it shall become a reality, he places his confidence in Saint Yves, defender of the humble, irreproachable, miracle-working, redresser of wrongs. Whenever any of the Trégorrois consider themselves seriously injured they have recourse to him, and in making him the judge of their quarrels, they call upon him by the beautiful name of *Sant Ervoan ar Wirionez*.*

* Saint Yves le Vêridique: Saint Yves the Truth-shower.

CHAPTER II

IT is not, however, in his church at Minihy that Saint Yves grants audiences in this capacity, but upon one of the opposite hills on the other side of the Jaudy, a narrow spot, shaded by elms, overlooking the creek of Porz-Bihan.

There upon the lands of the seigneurs du Verger, a chapel formerly stood, dedicated to Saint Sul. They were of the noble family of Clisson, these du Verger lords, and towards the eighteenth century they added to the chapel a granite ossuary, intended to serve as their family vault. After the Revolution the chapel suffered the fate of hosts of other oratories, which, either from want of funds, or from the carelessness of the clergy, fell into ruin. The chapel of Saint Sul disappeared, but the ossuary remained. The statues of the saints, no longer sheltered by the larger building, there found a refuge. Amongst them was a figure of Saint Yves, very ancient, rather barbaric in character, which for these two reasons was looked upon by the people of the neighbourhood as an authentic likeness.

I saw this sanctuary of Porz-Bihan when I was a child.

I was taken there by an old woman of Pleudaniel, where we were then living. She was called M^onik, familiar diminutive for M^one or Marie Yvonne. As for her trade, she was a tow-carder; all the winter she

carded. I often used to run away at nightfall, and sit beside her as she worked in her chimney-corner, stooping forward towards her solitary pine candle. She had a most prodigious memory, in spite of her seventy years, and told me wonderful things about which no one else seemed to know anything. She spoke in a slow, even, monotonous voice, and I loved listening to her to such an extent that I took no heed to the grinding sound of her combs. Indeed, I am not sure but that the strident accompaniment added to the weird charm of her stories.

At the end of the cold season, as soon as the pale March sun began to shine, M^onik changed her occupation. She then became a pilgrim. People used to come and seek for her, begging her (always for a small consideration), to go to some particular chapel or fountain there to pay devotions in their stead. From that time her days were passed trotting about the roads. One morning as I passed her house, I found her at her door just putting on her shoes.

"Where are you going to-day, old M^onik?" I asked.

"Not far, my dear. Just over by Trédarzec, scarcely two leagues away as the crow flies."

"Oh, M^onik," I begged, "as it is such a little way, do please let me go with you."

She shook her head several times very gravely, making a queer little noise: "heu . . . heu . . ." as though it required much consideration to decide such a momentous matter, then finally answered—

"Well, come along then."

We set out in the exquisite freshness of the things

of the morning. I was proud to be travelling thus with old Mōnik, whom I looked upon as a very distinguished person, living as she did in perpetual and close converse with the saints.

We went by paths known only to my guide, short cuts that led through the high grass of the meadows and among the prickly thickets of the moorlands, and always a great hush lay over the dewy land.

We walked at a good pace, so that was how I noticed by-and-by that Mōnik was limping with one foot.

"It is nothing," said she, in answer to my remark about it. "I had to put something in my shoe, and it hurts me a little."

"Why don't you take your shoe off?" I asked.

But she waved the matter away with her hand, as if to say, "Pray say no more; after all, it is my business, not yours," and went limping on as before, murmuring vague prayers, of which I understood not a word.

At Trédarzec she stopped at the church door, telling me to sit on a tombstone and wait for her till she had finished praying inside; . . . then, a moment or two after, we were again on our way through the fields.

"And now," said Mōnik, "you must be quiet; do not talk to me just now. You can amuse yourself by whistling to the blackbirds."

I noticed that her manner had become very abrupt, almost savage. Her little eyes were gleaming strangely in her withered old face, roughened and wrinkled like the bark of an oak tree. All kinds of disagreeable thoughts came to me, quite spoiling my pleasure, and I would have run away had I dared. But I have kept only a



MONK'S PILGRIMAGE

very confused remembrance of this part of the journey I know that every now and then we passed the threshing-floors of farms, and the farmers' wives, who all recognized Mônik, came to their doors to speak to her as we passed.

"Ah, Mônik," they would say, "so you are going down there?"

"Yes, yes, once again," she would answer; "when things are not as they should be, one must go to some one who will set them right."

These mysterious remarks, exchanged in low, quick tones, did not serve to lessen my uneasiness.

In the hollow of a ravine, between moss-trimmed walls of granite, a fountain of cold black water slept forlornly. Mônik knelt upon its margin, and I thought that she was going to drink. But she only took a little water in her two hands and scattered it upon the earth around, muttering strange, unknown words.

Then came highlands ("meziou," as they are called), waste, bare, and billowy; a last plateau, and before us, just beyond the glistening calm of the river, Tréguier arose, luminous, "thrown up in a single jet"—a dream city, with the purple tints of its old roofs, its multitude of turrets, and in the midst, all rosy red, the tall spire of its cathedral, circled round by great flocks of jackdaws. The yards of the ships, entangled in the branches of the trees that lined the quay, seemed covered once again with the green shoots of former springtides.

Every little sound reached us quite distinctly, the clatter of the sabots on the pavement, the singing of the caulkers in the boats.

Further back, amid a confusion of foliage, lay Minihy, and Plouguiel stood out in silhouette on the ridge of a promontory.

To me, that day, Tréguier seemed a fairy city lying in the midst of an enchanted land.

Meanwhile, Mōnik had turned off to the right by a bush of broom, where a deserted dove-cote cast a melancholy shade. Near by, two or three poor slate-roofed cottages, a cluster of elms distorted by the westerly winds, and at their feet, in a hidden nook, a queer little building, half chapel, half stable. We were at our journey's end.

"Say your prayers, child," said Mōne to me. "Here lives the great saint of the Bretons, here lives Yves le Vêridique."

They were the first words that she had spoken to me since leaving Trédarzec. She added—

"But first take a good look at him; that is his statue that you see over there in the angle of the wall. He is represented exactly as he looked when he was alive, during the time that he was Rector of Tréguier."

A ghostly vapour filled the sanctuary, which was lighted only by the door, and by a kind of loop-hole pierced in one of the side walls. At the end, a rough, whitewashed altar had been built, and upon its bare stone top, unadorned by either cloth or ornaments, a row of saints leant one against another, shoulder to shoulder, like a group of drunken men. They had, for the most part, rough but kindly faces, each framed by a woolly head-dress and a beard collar, reminding one unmistakably of the people by whom we were

constantly surrounded, fishers of the Trieux and sailors of the Jaudy.

One solitary statue occupied the corner on the right ; it was that to which M^onik had directed my attention. It had a human figure, much taller than any of the others, but equally worn away ; the wood of which it was formed was cracked, rotten, infected with a leprous mouldiness. The face alone had preserved some traces of the ancient colouring, strangely faded ; and the dull, weird pallor gleamed in the shadow as though it were phosphorescent, making one think of the face of a corpse seen by candle-light.

I only dared to glance at the figure stealthily, too frightened to pray or even to feel much curiosity. I knew well with what terrible powers this saint was said to be endowed. During the long winter evenings the old tow-carder had enlightened me a good deal on the subject by means of mysterious hints and half confidences. So I was not particularly comfortable at finding myself face to face with this uncanny person, whose eyes had the most disconcerting way of staring at one. M^onik had taken the shoe from her left foot, the one with which she had been limping, and having removed from it one of those eighteen-farthing bronze pieces, then still sometimes met with in the Trégorrois, put it carefully in a fold of the saint's alb. Then, turning up her petticoat, so that her bare knees rested on the damp soil, she entered into a state of devotion.

The time seemed long, very long. I was sitting among the grass outside the chapel, watching the sails glide down the smooth green river. Suddenly M^onik began to speak aloud in a sharp tone. I leaned forward

and saw her standing up, addressing the saint quite severely ; and shaking him by the shoulder several times, she cried aloud in Breton—

“If they are right, condemn us. If we are right, condemn them. Let them wither upon their feet and die at the appointed time.”

In her voice and gesture there was a kind of savage ferocity that frightened me.

She came out of the oratory, her eyes lighted by an unholy gleam, and three times made the tour of the exterior. This over, she knelt for a few moments before the entrance, and when she rose she wore her usual expression, her grandmotherly face full of a childish sweetness, whose very wrinkles seemed to smile.

“That is over,” said she ; “come, let us get away quickly.”

It was simply delicious, this return in all the joy of the midday sunshine through the lovely early spring-tide. Mōnik talked and talked as though to make up for the silence she had been obliged to observe up to then. At Trédarzec she absolutely insisted on my eating cakes at a little roadside stall. How gay she was, to be sure ! The ends of old songs kept coming to her lips. I had never seen her in such high spirits. She was not limping now. Oh dear me, no, not in the least ; far from that, she trotted nimbly along, hopping like a bird.

“You seem very happy, old mother,” said I at last.

“Ah, so I am, little son. I have a weight off my mind. Some of the commissions that they give me to do are not at all pleasant, my dear.”

"What was the one you did not like to-day, Mōnik?"

"Hush," she murmured, stopping suddenly as though to listen to a chaffinch that was chirping loudly on a clump of alders close by; and I did not dare to press her, so we talked of something else.

What Mōnik from a professional scruple refused to tell me, I learnt later.

The owner of a fishing-smack at Camarel, Pleudaniel, had had a dispute with his sailor, something to do with some accounts that they could not agree over. Bitter words were exchanged, and the quarrel kept growing. They continued to fish together, but often passed twenty or thirty hours at sea without exchanging a single word, and people were heard to say—

"You will see that no good will come of that business."

One night the sailor presented himself in dripping clothes, with a wild excited air, at the Customs House at Lézardrieux. His tale ran that the smack, which was a rotten old thing, had struck on a rock, had foundered, and that the master, unable to swim, had been forced to "drink once for all."

Now, there was nothing at all improbable in this story, and no one at first disbelieved the sailor. But presently the neighbours at Camarel began to gossip. Roused by this, the widow of the drowned man made a scene at the funeral, which took place, when, at the end of the ninth day,* the body was recovered.

* It is a firm belief all along the Breton coast (justified, so they say, by many examples) that the sea never gives up the bodies of those whom she has swallowed in less than nine days.

"Yes, yes," she cried, just as the coffin was disappearing into the grave, "we all know about your death. I swear that those who are rejoicing over it shall have cause to weep."

From that moment the sailor found life no longer worth living. There was not an insult that he had not to submit to from the widow and her numerous relations. In vain did he seek work under another master ; every one told him, with an ironical air, that they had no desire for a man on board who brought ill luck. At last, just as he was on the point of quitting the country, in despair he went to see M^{on}nik, going at nightfall so that he should not be noticed.

"Yves le V^{er}idique must decide between the widow and myself," he said. "I implore you to go and appeal to him in my name."

We have seen how faithfully the deputy-pilgrim fulfilled her commission. During the course of the following year the widow fell into a decline, withered on her feet like a plant injured in its root, and finally died. The sailor had gained the day.

This popular form of the cult of Saint Yves will doubtless remind my readers of the famous proof of the "judgment of God" so usually resorted to in the Middle Ages.

And now the little oratory of Porz-Bihan is a thing of the past. When I went there this summer to refresh my childish memory of the place, I found, indeed, the deep ravine with its fountain of water, too black to reflect my face as I bent over it ; and on the bare plateau I once again noticed the dove-cote, casting the same solitary shadow as of yore. I came across the

elm trees, too, more twisted than ever, fixed in paralytic attitudes. By the side of the stony road was the same group of low, heavily roofed huts, whose shaking walls were propped by oars. But of the ancient building nothing remained save the foundations, represented by some rough scattered stones, buried beneath a fretwork of brambles, from which the neighbouring children were gathering blackberries, bringing back to my remembrance a certain little scamperer of meadows whom I had known in former years.

I have related elsewhere* the circumstances under which this shrine was demolished. The Rector of Trédarzec, in whose parish it stood, was foremost in the work of destruction. He had it entirely razed to the ground, and removed the saint to a garret in the parsonage.

But it is easier to pull down a wall than to root up a superstition, especially in Brittany.

People still continued to come to pray upon the site of the old chapel. Not long ago, indeed, a woman of the country of Goëlo, having been cheated by a notary, passed the night on the spot, lying prostrate on the earth, under rain which fell in torrents, and returned home, half dead with cold, but sure of being avenged.†

* "La Légende de la Mort," p. 222, note 2; read also "Crucifié de Kéraliès," that delicate, sombre, yet passionate story in which Charles le Goffic has told in another setting the Drama of Hengoat. The victim was named Omnès, and the old sorceress who devoted her to Saint Yves (the Kato Prunennec of the story) was named Kato Briand.

† On the day I visited Porz-Bihan, in December, 1903, no fewer than three pilgrims had been seen praying on the site of the demolished chapel.—(F.M.G.)

There are many people in the neighbourhood who will tell you that the saint goes every evening to Porz-Bihan to retake possession of his ruined house. They have often met him.

But the story does not stop here, for it is said that the sacrilegious rector was punished for his crime by Saint Yves himself. Here are the circumstances :—

On a certain evening after nightfall, three men strangers to the parish, presented themselves at the door of the parsonage.

"What do you want?" asked the servant.

"We wish to speak to monsieur the rector."

"He is at dinner. What do you want with him?"

"We want him to allow us to kneel before the image of Yves le Véridique, who, they say, is a prisoner in his garret."

Impressed by the curious tone in which these words were spoken, the servant hastened to warn her master, although she knew that he disliked being disturbed during his meals.

A moment after, the rector, napkin in hand, appeared at the dining-room door. He looked very angry indeed.

"Be off," he cried, "you rascals! Saint Yves has nothing to do with your murderous prayers."

"So be it," calmly answered one of the strangers. "That being so, we all three summon you to his tribunal. To-day is Saturday; you will have the night for repentance, and to-morrow—well to-morrow you will not celebrate High Mass."

Then the mysterious visitors disappeared, no one could say how.

The rector retired to bed at his usual hour. He

felt depressed, and was haunted by gloomy thoughts. As for the servant, she was in a state of absolute terror. She turned over and over between the sheets, quite unable to sleep. The sinister prophecy of the three pilgrims still obstinately sounded in her ears.

Suddenly she started. Down the staircase from the garret came a heavy step, "the step of some one made of wood." Now it sounded in the corridor; a door opened, there was a cry, a long, terrible groan, interrupted by a choking rattle. Was it in the rector's room? "There will be plenty of time to go and see. Misfortunes are always known soon enough," thinks the servant. And so she lay still, with her face against the wall, and the sweat pouring from her body.

When, at early dawn on the morrow, they entered the chamber of the rector, they found him dead in his bed, the coverlet pulled up over his face.

CHAPTER III

I NEED not say that even in the eyes of our peasants, all the mass of superstition to which the cult of Yves le Véridique has given birth is no more than a caricature of the broad, pure, humane worship that they render to the true Saint Yves.

Visit the cottages of the seashore, or, as they call it in Breton, "the Armor Trégorrois." What strikes you even as you cross the threshold is a simple coloured fresco drawing, by an unpretentious artist. It is always in the best-lighted position, generally in the window embrasure, where the faded family photographs glitter in their smart frames.

Nine times out of ten the drawing represents Saint Yves, and if you go from one cottage to another, you will find the type invariably the same; the face beardless and gentle, the body concealed in a priestly stiffness, a purse in the right hand, a book in the left, the whole figure having the air of a very young priest lately come from the seminary, of a clerk quite recently promoted to the charge of souls. In my childhood I have known vicars who resembled this figure feature for feature, fair rosy young men with shy awkward gestures and meditative eyes, a mixture of the peasant and the mystic.

There used formerly to be all over Brittany a wandering brotherhood of rustic painters, who went from village



to village decorating the houses of the poor with these sacred pictures. Poor daubers for the most part they were, but, struggling hard nevertheless after a high dream of idealism, they now and then had happy inspirations, chance intuitions worthy of old Orcagna.

I am very much afraid that *Mabik Rémond* will be the last of these our popular painters. He is one of the most curious personalities of that Brittany, now fast disappearing. I had been meaning to pay him a visit for some months. His cottage crowns a rock in the romantic valley of the Guindy about two kilometres from Tréguier. Outside it is nothing more than an ordinary hovel, but within it is indeed a sanctuary. Even the altar is there, at the far end of the house, facing the hearth. Above it is a tabernacle of glazed earthenware, ornamented with an extraordinary representation of the Last Supper. As to furniture, there are but the barest necessities: a bed, a cupboard, standing beside one another with the uncomfortable air of things that feel out of place. For the rest, empty walls, or rather peopled—peopled to excess with Mabik's superabundant visions.

At the moment when I crossed the threshold, the master of the house was seated on a stool in the chimney-corner superintending the cooking of the mid-day meal. He welcomed me without disturbing himself, according to Breton fashion.

"If you are a Christian, make yourself at home here," said he, with the quiet politeness of those of the lower orders in Basse Bretagne, who allow people to come among them.

Two coarsely carved heads projected from the angles of the chimney. One held the iron claw of the *gold-lutik*

(the long, slender, twisted pine candle) between its lips, like a pipe. It was Ravachol, Mabik explained to me, and the other opposite was the devil tempting him. *Le Petit Journal* has found its way into this unlettered Armorica.

We soon became the best of friends, for I spoke Breton, and he was a smoker. Whilst helping himself to my tobacco he told me the story of his life.

He was born, to use his own expression, in some ditch or other, like any weed, and ever since he had been sweeping chimneys. Every now and then he had married, and had been, as he said, "widowed and re-widowed;" he was now living with his fourth wife. As I expressed my sympathy, he observed philosophically—

"Oh, they are always a little damaged when they marry me; but," he added quickly, "they have all been pretty enough to make up for that, as any of my neighbours will tell you."

He certainly is ugly enough—bald, with a dirty bristling beard, and squinting eyes, a regular "paysan du Danube," even to his eloquence, with soot, moreover, great plaques of black, encrusting his old cheeks. If any one asked him why, with the river at his very door, he never washed himself, he would reply with a mischievous look, that for at least a quarter of an hour afterwards the clear soul of the running water would be troubled by it, and very likely she would be too disgusted to sing.

"She has quite enough to do," he would say "washing the dirt off those townspeople."

The townspeople he detests, and looks upon them with the lordly contempt of one of the rebels of 1830,

expressed in language whose picturesque violence I must be excused from translating.

"I want to hear about your saints, Mabik Rémond," say I, after a little while. "Tell me about your museum."

"There it is," he answered, waving his hand around. "Those are the walls on which I practise. When I have really settled my man in, and know that from that time forward I shall have him ready to hand, I lay a layer of limewater over him, and begin something else. You see this Saint Trémeur? I painted him out fifteen times. It is very difficult to catch the expression of a man of that kind—one who carries his head in his arms instead of on his shoulders. Then that Saint Laurence—ah, he gave me a lot of trouble; and Saint Herbot here was worse still. What do you say? My models? Oh, just the stone or wooden figures I kneel to in the chapels, when I am on my chimney-sweeping journeys through the Trégorrois country between Plestin and Paimpol. I look at them, I study them, I pray to them, and then I carry away their likeness in my eyes."

And so, no doubt, he has, for he has remained very faithful to ancient traditions. These early Breton saints have bequeathed their secret hearts to him, and he has reproduced their awkward yet expressive appearance with extraordinary fidelity. It is a very simple form of art, coarse one might almost call it, and yet symbolical to a rare degree—symbolical, and at the same time intensely realistic.

"When and how did this idea of being a painter of saints first come to you, Mabik?" I asked at length.

"How can I tell? Does any one know why the stars rise when the night comes down? I have always

been fond of the beautiful things in the churches, the old, old churches of the past, that were full of such marvels as we shall never see again. When I was quite a little lad, travelling hither and thither, sweeping chimneys, I used often to sleep in deserted chapels, for no one thought of shutting their doors. I sometimes lay awake for a long time before going to sleep, or rather I used to keep on waking up in the night, fancying that I heard the poor saints weeping in the darkness.

“‘Mabik,’ they would say to me, ‘Mabik, we are so very, very old, older even than your dear father ; ours is indeed a sad fate. When we have quite rotted away we shall be forgotten ; no one will remember even our faces.’”

He paused a moment, and then went on in a lower voice—

“Besides, you know, there was something else. The women are often very troublesome. They make scenes, and when that happens I don’t stay to listen ; I just pack off. I dare say you know the ruined oratory of Saint Elud in the pine wood, a little above La Fontainede-Minuet. Well, that is my refuge, my ‘house of peace.’ No more human voices there ; no more scolding tongues, but a deep solitude where the days flow slowly by under the great melodious trees. One winter, a short time after my second marriage, I lived out there for over a week. I had taken a few crusts of bread by way of food, and as for drink, I had only to go to the spring. The nights were glowing and frosty. I put together a roof of bracken to shelter my head, and a fire of pine needles to warm my feet, and one night as I



THE OLD, OLD CHURCHES OF THE PAST, THAT ARE FULL OF SUCH MARVELS AS WE SHALL
NEVER SEE AGAIN

was just falling asleep I heard some one call me by my name. I opened my eyes, and there before me, out of the white mist that rose from the valley, I saw a vision grow, the phantom of a saint, whom I knew at once. It was Yves of Kervarzin, the kindly priest, the entertainer of houseless vagabonds, the friend of penniless wretches.

"As he showed himself to me that night, so I have painted him ever since, as far as I was able, with his black cap, his long cassock, and his beautiful alb, all sparkling as though woven out of the moonlight. It was he who began my fame as an artist. I painted him first in one farm, then in another, till at last, as soon as I went into a house, they would catch me by the waistcoat, crying—

"Sweep our chimneys or not as you please ; that is all one to us, but you must draw over there by the window ; you must draw your Saint Ervoan.'

"And even now, when I pass by the doors, the little ones flock out, crying—

"Here is Mabik Rémond ; here is the blackbird of Saint Yves.'

"But unfortunately the good things of this life only come once. Can you tell me of a single fisherman's or peasant's cottage in Trégor which has not the great holy figure upon its walls ? So I have been obliged to look for other subjects. Oh yes, I know that in our country there are plenty of saints. Boatloads of them landed hereabouts that had Lewias to pilot them and Tugdual as captain. I know them all well enough, and if there was any good in it I could give you their names, their history, and the faces that have come down to us as theirs. I even bring them to life again

after a fashion, with a little soft brick and some soot. People say, 'Make us such and such a saint, Mabik,' and I make him. But look here, I'll tell you what it is. If I could do as I liked, I would paint none but Saint Yves. The young rascals are quite right; a painter of Saint Yves I have lived, and a painter of Saint Yves I shall die. . . ."

So spoke Mabik Rémond on that peaceful August afternoon, when for a little while I was his guest, while the mill of Job-An-Dû tick-tacked steadily down in the valley, and the bells of Minihiy rang for a baptism.

CHAPTER IV

TWO years earlier, during the vacation of 1890, I was sitting beneath the spreading shadows of the garden at Rosmapamon.* We had been talking of the new tomb of Saint Yves which was shortly to be dedicated in the church of Tréguier, and now, in this shadowy old garden, the greatest enchanter whom Brittany has produced since Merlin, called up before a group of his friends those memories of his childhood that centred round the ancient monument.

"I never saw it with my eyes," said he. "It was destroyed during the Revolution by the horde of vandals who have left such terrible marks of their passage over our Armorica. But several old people whom I knew in my childhood remembered it, and they have often told me about it. It seems that it must have been a most beautiful thing. Our sculptors in the fifteenth century were very clever artists, and quite original. It is most lamentable that such a masterpiece should have disappeared. As far back as I can remember, there was never anything in the place where it formerly stood but a slab of red marble. My mother had her chair close beside it, at the foot of the pulpit. When first they thought of re-erecting the monument, they raised this slab, and made some excavations in the hope of discovering relics of the saint.

* See note at the end of chapter.

"Can you believe me, when I say that they found nothing? It is very much to the honour of our honest Breton clergy that it was so. Italian priests would certainly have found something.

"Perhaps it is a pity that the new tomb has been placed so exactly on the site of the old. I myself am sorry for it. In its present position it lacks distinction space, remoteness; anywhere else it would have looked better; in the Duke's Chapel, for example. At all events, it is to be hoped that by the aid of some suitable dark-coloured pedestal it will be enabled to stand out better from its surroundings.*

"There is another thing that I regret very much, the omission of good John of Kergoz from among the ranks of those figures that form the guard of Saint Yves. He was the saint's teacher, and the most devoted of his friends. I once visited the old manor house of Kerborz, and saw the room where they studied together, John acting as tutor. When the time at last came for the boy to leave home, that time so dreaded by all Breton mothers, it was to John of Kergoz that Dame Azou du Quinquiz entrusted her son with all kinds of anxious instructions. How seriously he undertook his task, leading Yves as by the hand up to man's estate! You know that the saint died early. John himself, on the other hand, persisted in living on, until he had taken part in the canonization of his pupil. It was not till then that he laid down his trust, and I think it must have been a very touching sight to see the old man of ninety years speaking with such energy and enthusiasm, that he not

* See the description which Monsieur de la Borderie has given of the tomb.

only convinced his audience, but drew tears from their eyes. This is how he should have been represented on the tomb. But I have sought for him in vain, and I cannot help feeling very sorry for the omission."

I give the above conversation word for word. But alas for the simple subtle charm in which this wizard clothed his every utterance. That secret he has carried with him to his grave.

I was at Tréguier on Monday, the eighth of September, the second day of the *Triduum*. What a startling contrast between the old narrow streets, for centuries benumbed in cloistral slumber, and those long, winding, gliding crowds, seething here and there into deep whirling eddies.

But I must confess that my Breton feelings are always a little shocked by the very popularity of these religious festivals. Here, for instance, it seemed to me that the effect was too theatrical, the music too professional, there were too many sightseers, too many photographers. There is a certain jealous bashfulness about our race that shows itself whenever her innermost feelings are called in question, as they are by these exquisite antiquated ceremonies in which she finds comfort and pleasure. Under a brusque exterior she is modest and refined ; ostentation frightens her.

At her ordinary pardons you will scarcely hear anything but the muffled sound of a few drums and the blowing of pastoral pipes. The blare of brass instruments disturbs the harmony of those sweet, solemn dreams that she scarcely dare murmur to herself ; and knowing this, and also with what jealous care the country of Tréguier has always preserved the worship of Saint Yves, I was shocked and distressed at all this noise.

It is during the first nights of May, when, according to a sweet local expression, "*le ciel s'ouvre, semble planer de plus haut sur la terre,*"* that the custom is to betake oneself by the dusky, sweet-smelling, hawthorn-bordered road to Minihiy.

After supper the folks begin to gather in groups at the foot of the great calvary that marks the beginning of the sacred way. It is at one and the same time an evening walk and a procession. The people pace slowly along under the stars, and the soft air is full of balmy odours. No cross is borne aloft; there are neither clergy nor choristers. Silence is the rule, and prayers are breathed forth with a vague murmuring that in no way disturbs the perfect calm. It is like a procession of shadows gliding though the night. The aged townswomen in their delicious old-fashioned caps, stifle their least footsteps in list slippers, hiding their hands in their broad sleeves after the manner of nuns. In all the ditches beggars are crouching, one-armed folks, cripples, blind people, and lepers, many of them waving torches so that the bright red glow may heighten the effect of their deformities. And all the while they clamour for alms, and pass the tragic story of their woes from one to another with a curious mixture of truth and exaggeration. Some seem to have their knees fixed in the ground; so motionless they are, one might almost take them for statues. Others are standing with their heads thrown back, so that the starlight is reflected on their white and sightless eyeballs. Others call attention to a large family sleeping round them, curly cherubs laid away in the grass of the ditch, lighted up by a tallow candle.

* "*Heaven opening, watcheth the earth from on high.*"

And oh, the bursts of lamentation, the hoarse voices of the old men, the shrill piping of the women.

"En hanô Sant Erwan . . . En hanô Sant Erwan . . ."

Alms come pouring in, gradually the sound dies away, and silence again grows deep.

During the whole way the pilgrims do not exchange a single word. It is "le pardon mut," the silent Pardon, one of the most usual forms of Breton devotion.

Now it will be seen at once that a people who understand piety after this fashion are scarcely likely to appreciate pompous shows which cannot be otherwise than rather crowded and discordant.

"Ma Doué," murmured a peasant girl from Louannec who stood near me at the Triduum at Tréguier, "how can one pray in the midst of all this noise?"

And there were thousands of people who felt as she did. But pray do not let me be misunderstood. I have no wish to condemn these great *fêtes* altogether. The majority of the public consider them quite successful, and certainly, if only the "fireworks" were left out, some portions of them would be of unquestionable beauty. Such among others, is that vigil of the faithful held in the cathedral during the night between Monday and Tuesday.

When I went into the church it was already late. In spite of the fresh night breeze and the air that entered by the open doors, one was conscious of a faint warmth, the heavy breath of the multitude that lay there half asleep in attitudes expressive of dull weariness. In the dim uncertain light of a few candles the great pillars rose, damp and green, like the trunks of giant trees

* "In the name of Saint Yves."

waving mysterious shadowy branches, high up beneath the vaulting, and a scattered prayer, continuous, monotonous, roamed through the silence, rising and falling like the humming of bees. Did it come from those hundreds of weary lips, or from those of the old stone bishops, who lay with joined hands under the low arches in the wall?

And among all the confused, whispering darkness was one bright spot—the tomb, a white bier lit by a forest of glittering candles.

There, white also, with the sparkling whiteness of marble, lay the dead figure of Saint Yves. Along the grille which surrounds the monument, there was a perpetual gliding of ghostly shadows moving to a sound of prayers and bead-telling.

Suddenly there arose a single voice, a man's voice large and full, singing to the tune of an old war-song, a hymn in praise of the saint.

“N’hen eus ket en Breiz, n’hen eus ket unan,
N’hen eus ket eur Zant evel sant Erwan. . . .”*

It had the effect of a bugle call on a courtyard full of soldiers. A great thrill shook the crowd. Even the sleepest sprang up, and a mighty choir began to repeat each verse after the singer. It was a wild distracting clamour, with which the very cathedral itself seemed to vibrate. Even the candles woke up and burned with a clearer light.

* “There is not in Bretagne, there is not one,
There is not a saint like our Saint Erwan. . . .”

CANON LE PON.



SAINT YVES OF KERMARTIN

Then the voices went out, all slumbered once more, and there at the end of the nave lay the white corpse of Saint Yves, watched over by a crowd of his poor worshippers.

Next day, in a blaze of sunlight, at the conclusion of High Mass, the processions began pouring out of the porch. Twenty parishes were there, headed by their clergy, all the Breton bishops, the successors of Saint Pol, Saint Briek, Saint Tugdual, and all the cowls of the old monkish city, coifs bent low over the faces, eyes faded and furtive. And the bells began pealing, not only those of the cathedral and of the neighbouring convents, but the bells of all the surrounding villages, Plouguiel, Minihy, Trédarzec, Kerborz, till the sound of their great voices rolled and echoed on high, like the booming swell of a mighty ocean.

Then the march began. Between two ranks of flags the gorgeously embroidered banners of the various parishes were borne aloft, swinging on staves, solid as masts. Some were new and glittering, others more venerable displayed their tarnished gold and dull embroideries with a certain pride.

On the greater number, worked in high relief, appeared the heavy figures of the saints of Trégor; one could almost read their names as they went by, Trémur, Tryphine, Coupaña, Bergat, Sezni, Guennolé, Gonéry, Liboubane, a whole barbarous litany of them, which the foreigners, gathered amateur-like from the neighbouring seaside resorts, tried in vain to pronounce.

Immediately before the skull of Yves Héloury, enclosed in its magnificent reliquary, walked six pages dressed in yellow and black, the colours of the saint,

bearing on their breasts the arms of Kervarzin, four blackbirds on a field of gold. Behind walked the prelates, the priests, and then followed the crowd, still singing to that old battle-song, the "Canticle of Sant Erwan." And it was certainly very magnificent.

In this imposing fashion they passed through all the streets of Tréguier. But to the great surprise of the faithful, they did not go to Minihy, they did not, that is to say, pay their homage to Saint Yves in his own home.

I like to think that this was out of respect for certain prejudices, which the Bretons express by saying—

"To each saint his own pardon."

ROSMAPAMON.—During the latter years of his life Renan, who was homesick for Brittany, hired this house, which stands on the slope of a wooded hill, facing the sea, near to Perros, a few miles from Tréguier. Since then it has remained in his family, and to-day his daughter, with her husband and little children, stay there during the summer.—(A. LE B.)



THE PROCESSION OF SAINT YVES
SHOWING THE SKULL IN ITS RELIQUARY

CHAPTER V

BUT after all there is only one festival which can truly be called the Pardon of Saint Yves ; it is that which is celebrated at Minihy on the nineteenth of May.

At the time of which I am going to speak we were living at Penvenan, a big, dull town on a bare plain that lies between the Guindy and the sea. High gorse-covered banks run over it in every direction, cutting it up into fields and meadows, so that in spring it is like a cobweb of golden threads.

It is a huge parish, and in the interior the labourers are quite comfortably off, growing wheat, and rearing flocks and herds. Some few of them are really rich, and live in roomy farms built of hewn stone like manor-houses.

But it is quite otherwise with the poor fishing clans scattered along the coast. In their villages, comfort is almost unknown. The men are away for five or six months of the year, toiling among the difficult and dangerous fisheries of Iceland and Newfoundland ; and many never come back. Then their families, falling into distress, go to swell the ranks of the *chercheurs de pain*. Now it is well known that in Brittany, begging, far from being considered a disgrace, is almost looked upon as an honourable occupation. The poor, like the

witless, are regarded as sacred beings ; whoever fails to show them respect runs the risk of eternal damnation. So every one treats them with the greatest consideration, and they have their bowl on the dresser, their mattress in the barn or the stable. In the district of Tréguier they form a regular society, and proudly style themselves the "clients of Saint Yves."

When his festival draws near, these ragged, infirm creatures deck themselves out in their tatters, and off they gaily start on their crutches.

"This is our Pardon," they say, "Pardon ar bewien, the Pardon of the Poor."

How I wish that in a few lines I could picture to you the face of one of these clients of the saint, perhaps the honestest man whom I have ever known. He was called simply Baptiste, as though he had never borne any other name. He lived on the road to Lannion, in a hut of which only the roof and the walls were wanting. The rain and the snow had free entry, and the wind had established itself there as though quite at home. Friendless cats swarmed in the far corners, and numbers of other beasts besides. If one joked Baptiste about them, he would answer philosophically—

"Duman e, ty an homm." ("My house is everybody's home.")

He had very strict notions about hospitality, had Baptiste, but was somewhat of a cynic, professing a serene indifference for externals, and only valuing matters that concerned the soul. He was, however, extremely fond of his pipe, and his face lengthened when he had nothing to smoke. Nor did a little glass of brandy now and then come amiss to him, but that was



all ; no other passion troubled his simple heart ; he went into his grave as pure as he had come out of his childish cradle. He died on the eve of his eightieth year, one frosty night, with no witness, without a cry, "closing his own eyes," to use the expression of the neighbour who found him dead. When they took off his clothes, they found in his pockets, beside his pipe and tobacco-pouch, an ancient scrap of a letter that no one was able to decipher, and on his thin, hairy breast a scapulary. Some few days earlier he had accosted my father in the street.

"I am looking to you to *lend* me a sheet, when the time comes to bury me," said he.

He did not in the least doubt being able to return it in the other world. Thus the Celts of old time looked beyond the term of this life. Baptiste differed, however, in some ways from others of his poor brethren. Not only did he never ask alms, but he refused them with an ill-disguised anger, however delicately offered. About this he was absolutely inflexible. He professed to believe that unearned bread choked those who ate it. Often when I came down in the morning, I would find him installed by the kitchen fire smoking. He had an inborn refinement, and always made a pretext of lighting his pipe or of telling some piece of news to get into one's house, nor would he come at all unless in entire sympathy with his hosts. He loved me for just those things which I loved, for all that Breton past of which even then I was a student. As to my parents, in his whole acquaintance he knew no one to compare to them, and in that he was certainly right, good man. I would go up to him and we would shake hands and begin to

talk ; then my mother would come in and ask him to stay to breakfast, "without ceremony."

"If you have any work for me to do, yes, certainly. If not, you know it must be no."

Of course there always was some work in reserve for Baptiste, preferably that which required a good deal of strength, such as moving rubbish-heaps or cleaving wood. He did it all with a charming inexperience, poor old fellow, but he was a gentle soul, prone to delusion ; he would persuade himself quite honestly that he had performed marvels, and always measured the quality of his work by the perspiration which trickled down his hollow cheeks.

"You are tiring yourself too much, Baptiste," my mother would say to him ; "we shall kill you ten years before your time by all this work." And the compliment always touched him to the quick, so that he beamed again. We used to make him sit down at table in the midst of us, as is the custom in old Breton homes. He was usually very hungry, for he did not taste even bread every day, and yet we had to press him to eat. Many times without his knowledge have we filled his pockets. His talk was always most interesting ; he had watched so many people live and seen so many things happen. Accumulated treasures of popular knowledge rolled about anyhow in his memory like the shingle on the seashore at the time of the rising of the tide, and, like a gatherer of wreckage, I always sought eagerly in the heap.

One evening he appeared on our doorstep decently dressed in almost clean rags.

"Would you like to take part in the Pardon of the

Poor?" he asked me, "they are expecting me at the house of the farmer of Saint Yves, my friend Yaouank, who is under certain obligations to me."

It was quite a godsend to me, and I hastened to accept his invitation. During the course of the afternoon, I had several times noticed that the town was more lively than usual. From all the little sandy roads flocked troops of beggars—men, women, children. They crossed the square without stopping, without even casting a glance at the house doors, then turned off on the road to Tréguier, where they disappeared between the hedges of fresh green broom. We took the same direction. It was nearly seven o'clock. Behind us, on the Perros side, the sun in his setting looked like the mouth of a furnace. Over our heads little fleecy clouds, white as fresh-washed wool, hung motionless, drowsing in the depths of the sky. Although his legs were bent beneath the weight of age, Baptiste walked at a brisk pace. As I observed this to him—

"Whoever is born poor ought to have good feet," he answered in the sententious way habitual to him. "It is not for nothing that people of my sort are called baleer-bro, trampers. Bread does not come to us of its own accord; needs must that we go to find it, and it is a trade that wants legs, or crutches," he added, pointing to a cripple shuffling along, a little before us, between his two wooden supports. Baptiste continued: "The books have no doubt told you what a walker Saint Yves our patron was?"

"Oh, the books say nothing about these things, gaffer; tell me about it yourself."

"What do they talk about then, these books? Well,

at all events, look you here. When Yves was old enough to go to school, his parents found themselves in a difficulty, for at that time, in the whole country of Trégor, there was only one master worthy to teach him. He was learned enough, but lived at Yvias, away down there at the lower end of the Goëlo, eight leagues away from Minihy. Azou de Quinquiz was only willing to send her son to school on condition that he took all his meals in the midst of his own people, and came home to sleep every evening; for the idea of being separated entirely from him was unbearable to her; yet on the other hand, it was necessary that he should be taught as quickly as possible in order to become a great saint. Now Yves noticed that his mother had long hours of sadness; so presently he asked her the cause of her grief.

“‘You mean to say that that is all?’ he cried. ‘Pack me up my ABC and my Catechism; to-morrow morning at daybreak I shall start for Yvias, and don’t trouble yourself, before twelve o’clock I shall be back again.’

“They let him have his way, and he started off for Yvias, carrying his little packet of books tied together by a cord, on his shoulder. When the other scholars arrived he was already in his place on the form. There he remained without stirring, very attentive, very diligent, till nearly half-past eleven. Then he rose.

“‘What is the matter?’ asked the master.

“‘It is time that I went home. I hear the footstep of the sacristan of Minihy going up the tower stairs to ring the Angelus.’

“‘Oh, but that is impossible.’

“‘Put your foot upon mine, and you will hear as I do.’

“The twelve o’clock Angelus had not finished sounding when the young saint was back beside his mother in the great hall of Kervarzin. This, they say, was his first miracle, and for two years he repeated it twice every day.”

CHAPTER VI

NEITHER Baptiste nor I had the invisible wings of Yves Héloury. Twilight had begun to fall, and still we had to climb the rise which enables one to join the Minihiy road without passing through the town. We scarcely spoke now, for the shadows invited to silence, and little by little there stole over me the vague melancholy which fills one's heart at the grey approach of evening, that mysterious foreshadowing of the twilight of life's day. Suddenly, as we emerged from a gap, the outline of a high, solitary belfry, bereft of its church, stood out against the sun, casting a shadow almost to our feet. It was the tower of Saint Michel. Naturally, we expected to find it there, standing upon this sharp backbone of land, in its ruin-scattered enclosure. But the apparition of the stone phantom was so sudden that it impressed us as a bad omen, and involuntarily we quickened our steps. A few crows, perched in the holes of the spire, croaked recall to the laggards of the flock, waving long black wings, which appeared enormous in the uncertain light.

"Let us make haste! let us make haste!" murmured Baptiste, and as soon as we were out of sight of the ghostly tower, he took the opportunity to tell me its legend.

"It all happened a few years after the death of



THE TOWER OF SAINT MICHEL.

Yves Héloury. Already the poor, his *protégés*, had turned his native town into a place of pilgrimage. They came there just as they do to-day, from all parts, with the greatest devotion, those who lived on the seashore being of course obliged to pass over the lands of Saint Michel in order to reach the village. But Saint Michel's was at this time a resort of the rich. Almost every gentleman in Tréguier had a country house there, where he lived with his family during the fine weather, from April to the beginning of October. In order that the ladies should have the Mass close at hand, these gentlemen had raised at their common cost, a magnificent church, which, built on a height, overlooked the belfries all round, including that of the cathedral itself, to which they say it was not inferior in splendour. As to the clergy, it had been stipulated that they should all be of good blood. In short, only gentlemen lived in this territory. They led a merry life there. Every day that God made there were hunting parties, soundings of horns, banquetings, drinkings, feasts and carousels. You can fancy that these people had no attention to give to Saint Yves and his poor. When they saw the beggars come through their thickets and fields, they were roused to indignation.

“‘Are we to allow these people, in their tattered clothes, to disturb our pleasure by the walking spectacle of their misery?’ they said.

“So counsel was taken, and, a short time after, criers were sent through all the parishes around to proclaim that the twenty or thirty estates, situated in Saint Michel's, would henceforward be endowed with a right of toll, and that it would take the form of a gold piece

for each person passing through the land. In default of payment, the delinquent would undergo such punishment as it should please the gentlemen to inflict upon him. To ask a beggar for a gold piece! You see the humour of it? The gentlemen themselves roared with laughter at the device. But there is a proverb, you know, that says, 'He laughs best who laughs longest,' and these people of Saint Michel had experience of that, for the joke cost them dear.*

"For one year, for two years, all went well, the edict succeeded. All the poor people made a large detour, and gave the place a wide berth. No doubt Saint Yves was not particularly pleased with this way of treating his people, but he waited till the proper moment came for manifesting his just anger. At last an occasion presented itself. One day a miserable blind man wandered into the forbidden precincts. The guard seized him and led him before the assembled noblemen.

" 'A-ha,' they cried, 'so we have caught one, have we? And where wast thou going, beggar?'

" 'To Saint Yves, worthy masters; may his blessing rest upon you.'

" 'Thou hast been caught trespassing on our land, thou must pay the fine.'

"By way of answer, the blind man turned his tattered pockets inside out, and nothing but a few crumbs of black bread appeared. Then the gentlemen made a sign to the guards, and the next instant they had hoisted the poor man up the clock tower, and made

* It is a curious fact, that in all Brittany, Saint Michel's is the only parish where I have noticed a proclamation against begging.—(F. M. G.)

him fast to the iron arms of the cross at the summit of the steeple.

“‘Pray Saint Yves to give you back your sight,’ cried his tormenters, ‘for you have the best position in the world from which to see his Pardon.’

“Scarcely had they finished speaking, when the sky became black as ink. A thick darkness fell over all the land as on the day when the Christ died, and from the belly of the clouds darted forth fiery serpents. In the twinkling of an eye, church, manors, woods, fields, all were destroyed, burnt up, reduced to cinders. Only the steeple, on which hung the martyred body of the old man, was spared. With regard to him, some even say that invisible hands unfastened his bonds, and that he found himself, he knew not how, walking safe and sound to Minihiy. As to the gentlemen of Saint Michel, there remains not a trace of them unless it be their souls, which, turned into crows, are condemned to fly ominously round the tower until the judgment day.

“Doue da bardono d’an Anaon. God’s pardon on the dead,” concluded Baptiste, crossing himself on his forehead, his lips, and his breast.

By this time we were entering Minihiy. The end of the one street looks out over a stretch of country, sinking in a gentle slope towards the flowery banks of the Jaudy, and beneath the calm night sky the waters of the river shone below us with a cold gleam. Before passing the churchyard, where pilgrims were walking silently round and round among the tombs, we paused, and our sight plunged through the arch of the porch into the church itself, following an avenue of candles, which went shining and narrowing down towards the altar.

It was very dark where we stood. Heavy foliaged trees, chestnuts perhaps, formed a vault above us, and the branches descended to the embankments that bordered the road, so that we groped our way along as through an underground passage. Suddenly the barking of dogs, a great sound of voices, and the bright shining of a blaze of brushwood. We were crossing the sill of the manor of Kervarzin.

"Is there room for two more, if you please?" cried Baptiste, in a cheerful voice.

The huge kitchen was already full of beggars, some leaning against the wooden half-partition, that in Breton farms shelters the hearth from the draught of the door, others crouching about on the hard earthen floor, or sitting knees to chin on the little bench that ran from end to end of the room.

At Baptiste's words a jovial old peasant, with curly grey hair, rose from the chimney-corner, and came toward us.

"Have you ever heard of a poor person being sent away from Kervarzin on the eve of the Pardon of the blessed Saint Yves?" he asked, smiling gravely, without removing his pipe from his mouth, and pressing the hand that Baptiste held out to him; "and it is not only the poor who are welcome at my house," he continued, when my conductor had introduced me, and I in turn had held out my hand. "Your father may possibly have told you that at the house of Yaouank-coz there is always hot soup and crêpes, with a free glass of cider for friends."

He had the manners of a gentleman, this peasant; and I was obliged to accept his oak armchair at the

angle of the hearth. Ah ! how pleasant it was there, before the clear flame that rose and rose, lighting up all the kitchen, painting with its red glow the polished doors of cupboards, transfiguring the faces of the beggars, wakening the joy of life in their faded features and lifeless eyes.

From the hook of the chimney-chain hung an enormous pot, from which, as the servant raised the lid, clouds of steam came pouring, and a rich smell of bacon filled the air. The table was covered with bowls, which a man had just filled with crêpes of black corn that he wrung asunder in his hands.

"Come, boys," cried Father Yaouank, "the soup is quite ready."

How can I ever picture to you the indescribable scene that followed? It threw one right back into the Middle Ages, to some *Cour des miracles*. To the comparative silence which until now had reigned among these people, tired out for the most part as they were, and glad to let themselves drowse in the warm comfort of a well-to-do house, a tumult succeeded ; a scuffling and hustling, accompanied by cries, oaths even, and blows ; everybody struggling at the same time to reach the table, each one anxious to be first to get hold of his bowl. The lame, especially, made a tremendous commotion, prodding among the legs of the able-bodied with their crutches, while a one-armed man, half-crushed, bellowed despairingly, waving aloft a huge arm, finished off by an immense hand. The blind stumbled about, stretching their arms out before them, rolling their sightless eyeballs, and from the hearth Yaouank-coz watched them, his pipe in the corner of his mouth, quietly amused.

"Now then ; one after another," he commanded, barring the way to the fireplace with his great body ; "whoever makes any disturbance comes last."

Then a calm succeeded. The procession of the pot began. The beggars approached one by one, presenting their crêpe-filled bowls, which the servant girl filled up with soup.

By the light of the fire I watched it all, and oh, the strange heads that I saw there ! Fat, some of them bloated, with purple bruises, looking for all the world like water-melons. Others thin, with an ascetic thinness, frozen faces of dead men ; all the life gone back into the feverish, restless eyes. Others hard and worn, with the energetic profiles of pirates, and some quite exquisite, too, I mean among the women, with a divine sadness of expression, a delicate, suffering pallor.

I remember one in particular, a pure type of the Madonna, mystical grace spread over her refined features, and inexpressible sweetness ruled her bearing. One would have thought her no creature of flesh and blood. Her naked feet, bronzed with the sun of the high-roads, scarcely seemed to touch the ground. She had long eyelids and very long lashes, but when she passed near to me I saw on her neck the traces of scrofula. I asked her name of Baptiste.

"She comes from Pleumeur," said he ; "she is an innocent. They say that she has the falling sickness, and that for six months of the year her body is all one wound."

Soon nothing could be heard but the noise of wooden spoons scraping the bottoms of bowls ; the soup had been swallowed in a few gulps.

The master of the house, the Penn-tiégez, knelt

up on the hearthstone and began to repeat the evening prayer. The beggars made the responses in a confused, stammering way, their voices sleepy and purring. Opposite me, on the other side of the hearth, stood a cupboard bed, its narrow opening looking like a window with little flowered chintz curtains. There, it is said, Saint Yves had his straw mattress and pillow of granite during the latter part of his short life, when he was Governor of Tréguier, with residence at Kervarzin, his family seat.

Lulled by the humming of the Breton prayers, my dreams went back to another evening in the year 1292, when, perhaps at that very hour, the good saint, on the point of falling asleep, thought he heard some one knocking at the door. He was not at all surprised, for his house, was it not an inn, at the service of all penniless, homeless souls? It never occurred to him to call his old servant who had already gone to rest. No, he rose himself, and, barefoot, went to draw back the bolt (is it certain, indeed, that he had a bolt?). As the door opened a blast of wind came in, a blast of bitter wind, laden with rain, and the sad voices of a row of poor creatures, crouching upon the doorstep, shivering piteously.

"Quick, quick! my children, I am just going to relight the fire; so come in, I have been waiting for you."

Yes, indeed, for he was always waiting for such as they. Whence did they come? Who were they? How many were there? What did that matter to him? I seem to see him kneeling down upon the same stone where Father Yaouank has just knelt, murmuring the evening prayer. He blows the fire,

which has almost gone out, even as the servant girl was doing a while since, and like her throws on armfuls of dry gorse, that flames bright and clear. The poor people come forward. They seat themselves in the arm-chairs at either corner of the hearth, and their rags steam in the gentle heat, while their faces, wet with rain and blue with the cold, brighten and shine, as their eyes say plainly to each other—

“How pleasant it is here in this good man’s home.”

Yves has gone to the larder, and has fetched a loaf of white bread, the remains of some pork, and a piece of salt beef. He sets it all before the beggars, that they may refresh themselves.

“Eat heartily, my friends,” says he; “eat as much as ever you want.”

When the bread, the pork, and the beef have disappeared, the chief of this wandering tribe, a tall rogue with copper-coloured skin, like that of a gipsy, wipes his mouth on the back of his hand, and begins holding forth to the saint.

“Oh, most revered and wisest of hosts,” he says, “I should be the ungratefulest of beggars, if, having received all this kindness from you, I did not make our circumstances known to you. Possibly when you hear who we are, you will cast us forth into the night and the cruel rain. Well, at all events, your goodness shall not be abused. My name is Riwallon; I am a native of Priziac, on the borders of Cornouailles and Vannes. As for my trade, I am a conjurer, and I excel in making love-ditties and war-songs. In all the countryside I have not my equal as a teller of the lives of heroes and the miraculous legends of saints.

"This is my wife, Panthoarda, the devoted companion of my long wretchedness. She plays the viol and tells fortunes ; moreover she knows the virtues of herbs and the art of curing by prayer ; she can also distinguish between the three hundred kinds of boils and tell which sacred fountain can cure each.

"These are my two sons, one plays the bagpipes, the other the clarinet. They have powerful lungs and nimble fingers.

"As to these two young girls, my daughters——"

But here Yves interrupts the conjurer. He has noticed that they are pretty, these two young girls, prettier perhaps than befits their poverty, and he has seen a blush beginning to mount into their pale cheeks.

"Come, come, my good man," he exclaims, "spare us all these details for this evening. Your wife and your children are half asleep. Even you yourself must be tired. May God's peace be with you in your slumbers. All that you need to know from me is, that this house is your home as long as you choose to make it such."

We know that they chose to do so for a long time, for eleven years later, that is to say, in 1303, at the time of the saint's death, they were still there.

CHAPTER VII

THE evening prayer finished, Yaouank-coz took down one of those enormous lanterns that waggoners hang in front of their carts, lighted it, invited me to follow him, and as we went out, the whole crowd of beggars closed in behind us. The night was slate-grey, sprinkled with tiny stars. We crossed the courtyard, the noise of our footsteps stifled by the soft litter with which it was strewn, and Yaouank, the light high above his head, kept crying, "This way, take care of the puddles."

Doors opened here and there, giving entrance to low buildings, grouped like the cottages of a hamlet, and the vaporous breath of animals warmed our faces, for we were among the stables. In single file the beggars passed in silently to the litter of fresh straw that had been laid for them. The most nimble climbed the ladder leading to the hay-lofts, while the cows, astonished, mooed softly in the darkness. Then from without I saw the great watchful lantern of the old farmer come and go, now on the ground-floor, now under the eaves, as he satisfied himself that each one had his place, warning this, settling that, having an eye above all to the avoidance of questionable proximities.

When at last we reached the house again, we

found Baptiste asleep, his arms spread out upon the table.

"If you wish to do likewise," said the farmer, "there is my bed. Oh, you will not be depriving me of it. I shall be on guard till to-morrow. I have had long experience of these poor folk whom I'm entertaining. There are no rascals among them, but there may very likely be some careless fellows. A pipe, you know, is a very tempting thing, and one spark is enough to do a great deal of damage."

"If that is so, may I be allowed to watch with you?"

"Here, Katik, make us a good purgatory fire, one that will warm us well without burning us. Very little wood, you know, and a good deal of peat."

The servant hastened off to carry out her master's order, then retired to bed; and we remained alone, seated on either side of the hearth, our feet stretched out toward the red-hot embers, glowing beneath their thick covering of peat.

The silence was vast, and yet there seemed a rustling, as though all the great memories with which this dwelling teemed were eddying round and round in mystic flight.

"Tell me, Yaouank," I began, "is what I have heard true?"

"Ah, you want to hear about the miracle of the soup, do you not? Well, I will tell you all about it. Of course I am not a learned man; I wish I were. But neither am I a fool. No, honestly I do not think it would come into anybody's head to take me for a fool.

Well, now, I saw that particular thing to which you have alluded—saw it with these two selfsame eyes that I have in my head. And I can tell you that they are eyes that see pretty clearly. Oh, I know that people say that I was drunk that evening—that evening, indeed! they might as well say this evening. Drunk, with eighty beggars in my house, just as I have to-night—eighty beggars lying about in the straw of my stables and in my hay-lofts. I should have been three times more foolish than any beast. Well now, here is what actually happened. You can make what you like of it. It was on the eighteenth of May, this very date. The whole week it had rained without ever leaving off. The roads round about were nothing but quagmires, and as to the fields where the pilgrimage paths lie, the grass was under water. All the morning it rained, and all the afternoon it still rained—rained in torrents. However, my wife—God rest her soul! for she is dead since then—began to get the poor folks' soup ready in the great pot just as usual.

“‘Really,’ said I, ‘if you take my advice, you will only put on the little saucepan, for we shall have nobody in such weather as this.’

“She did as I said, only putting on the saucepan that holds twenty bowls.

“By nightfall three guests had arrived, people of the neighbourhood, whom we invited to sup with us, intending to keep them afterwards to sleep in the house. Already the servant had bolted the door, and we were sitting round the fire chatting comfortably while waiting for evening prayer, when suddenly bang, bang on the door!

“‘Somebody else,’ thought we, ‘whom this awful weather has not frightened.’

“My wife ran to open to them.

“‘Jésus Maria,’ I heard her cry, clasping her hands, ‘how many more—how many more?’

“And we saw a flood of people enter, and after them more and still more. Soon the kitchen was quite full. All our usual beggars were there, those from Pleumeur, and those from Trédarzec, those from Penvénar, from Trévou, from Kermaria-Sulard. And amongst them were many strange faces, new pilgrims come from the depths of the country, from Ploumilliau, from Trédrèz and even from Plestin. They were pitiable to look at, poor things, soaked to the skin, dejected, miserable. Ah, how much good a little hot soup would have done them, and there was simply none left—possibly a few spoonfuls! I was furious with myself. But how could I have foreseen such a gathering? The poor souls were turning longing eyes towards the chimney. So I rose and said to them—

“‘We are extremely sorry; it is the first time that such a thing has ever happened to us, but really it was such frightful weather that we did not expect you. I am grieved to the bottom of my heart, but the fact is, we have not prepared any soup for you.’

“A blank despair spread over all their faces, and there was a moment of sad silence. Then from among them a man made his way toward me; the steam rising from their soaking clothes was so thick that I could not clearly see his face. He put one foot on the hearth-stone, lifted the cover of the saucepan, bent over it, and said in a firm, sweet voice—

“ ‘With what remains of this soup you shall still give comfort to these wretched souls ;’ and having so spoken he retired to one side.

“ His words impressed us. My wife began putting the crêpes into the bowls, and the poor folk made their way to the hearth as usual. The servant began measuring out the soup ; one, two, five, ten beggars presented themselves in turn. The pot seemed inexhaustible. Twenty came and went, then twenty more, and still the servant kept pouring.

“ My wife had become pale with excitement. However hard she worked at her task she could not get on fast enough. One of the farm-hands had to come and help her.

“ As for me, a sense of awe stole over me. We all felt that we were taking part in something supernatural, and held our breath, scarce daring to move. The weight of the miracle was upon us ; not one poor person, I assure you, went to bed without his soup. Now, that is what I actually saw fifteen years ago to-day. When I sought for the man who had spoken he had disappeared I asked who he was, but nobody knew. One old woman said—

“ ‘As I was coming along by the churchyard wall I saw him cross the steps, and after that he walked by my side. Twice he held out his hand to me to help me over the puddles. I think he wore the tonsure, for his head looked white under the rain.’

“ She said no more, but every one was convinced that the strange beggar was no other than Yves Héloury, the old master of this place. You can think what you please about it, but I tell you again that that is what I

saw, and many others are still living who can bear witness to it."

Yaouank-coz knocked his pipe on the nail of his thumb to shake out the ashes, and seemed absorbed in memories of the past. Baptiste snored on the table. The pendulum of the clock came and went with great heavy strokes, cleaving time somewhat as the butcher does his block. By listening to this persistent, regular noise I ended by falling asleep, with my neck resting against the bed of Saint Yves, my brain haunted by strange confused dreams of poor people fastened to church spires, eating soup out of golden spoons.

It is Sunday. The bells of Minihy give out their clear sweet sounds. The pale smile of dawn silvers the sky. Grouped in the courtyard, around the well, beggars are taking their morning wash. On the roof of the dovecote pigeons are preening their wings. A farm boy, with bare legs, leads his horses to the trough. The air is fresh and light, full of a turquoise haze that idealizes everything. Nothing has changed in this scene since the days when Saint Yves lived here. The river lies below at high water, like a fair, glittering sheet bordered by dwarf alders, whose foliage dips in the flood. The hills succeed each other, undulating like an ocean swell, cradling in their depths villages, parks, orchards, meadows that fade away and away into infinity. In the grey light of the distance the silhouette of Goëlo stands out delicately, bristling with slender pines, whose fringed plumes stir like smoke with every breath that passes. At church they have just celebrated low Mass, and the air is full of the smell of burnt wax. Tiny ships with complicated rigging hang from the beams ; women pray,

their faces buried in their hands ; many are dressed as widows, in black, glistening stuff falling in soft folds ; some of the ragged pilgrims roam along the wall, perpetually prostrating themselves and making the sign of the cross. On one of the side-walls one can read the will of Yves of Kervarzin, where the parish of Minihiy and the poor of all Brittany figure as the principal legatees. It was put up there, they say, by a pious young lady, who had to expiate a great sin, committed in her youth ; for, under the Reign of Terror she had represented the Goddess of Reason in a state procession at Tréguier. In the churchyard close by the porch is a sculptured tomb of modest aspect and without inscription. An opening in the form of an arch goes through it from one side to the other. The pilgrims pass through on their hands and knees, and kiss with their lips the stone below. As they rise, their faces are soiled with mud, but radiant. They have derived a sacred strength from the rude contact, and the life-giving virtue of Yves Héloury has passed into their souls. For it is here that he rests, never doubt it ; here it is that the friend of the poor, who wished to be buried poorly, really reposes ; here only one can breathe the perfume of his sweet soul, in the midst of this atmosphere scented by the breath of the country and the salt of the sea.

The people of Tréguier have raised a magnificent tomb to him in their cathedral. There the rich go to pray to him, those who seek the luxurious, sensuous beauties of art in their worship. But the multitude of the humble will never desert the little pilgrim paths to Minihiy. They will always be found winding in long



THE OLD TOMB OF SAINT YVES AT MINIHY

pious, murmuring procession towards that sun-crowned hill whose feet are bathed by the Jaudy. For there the blessed, gracious favour of Saint Yves has remained shining in the peaceful smile of the country that he loved best when on earth.

BOOK II.—RUMENGOL

THE PARDON OF THE SINGERS

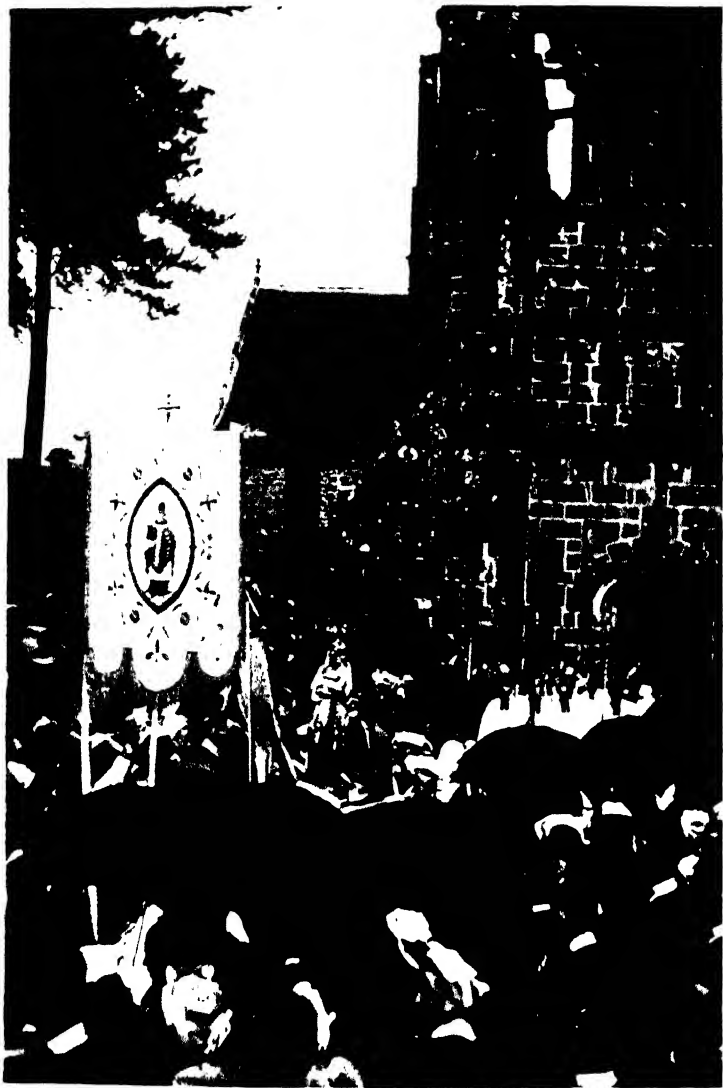
DEDICATED TO CHARLES LE GOFFIC

CHAPTER I

NO sooner had King Gralon, at Gwennoilé's command, cast his daughter into the sea than the waves that had just drowned Ker-Is paused, suddenly calmed, and the old king found himself alone with the monk, safe on dry land, just where to-day the church of Pouldahut * stands.

His horse, old like himself, was trembling through every limb, panting, with drooped head, and nostrils dilated with fright. Softly Gralon caressed the poor beast's neck, and stroked his foam-flecked mane, still tangled with the seaweed. Of all whom he had loved, this was the only creature remaining to him, and as he thought of it, life seemed very barren and empty, so that he almost regretted that he had not perished with the others. Above all, that last terrible cry of his daughter haunted him; he could not forget the reproachful look she had cast upon him, as he pushed her back into the swirling waters. Could it possibly be

* Pouldavid, near Douarnenez.



THE PROCESSION OF OUR LADY OF RUMENGOL.

true that he had done this horrible thing? What! with his own hand had he drowned his child! He had had no pity on her weeping, or her terror! And she had clung so confidently to him, imploring him in her own sweet voice—

“Save me, father! Save me! Oh, save me!”

But instead, he had listened to the monk, to this ill-omened man. As Gwennolé watched the face of the king, he marked the stormy movement of his thoughts, and, after a pause, said sternly—

“Gralon, give thanks to God, who by my means has lengthened your old age, so that you may have a chance of working out your eternal salvation.”

Cowed by the imperious tone of the monk, the Chief of Cornouailles raised his aged face, all bathed in tears, toward heaven, and prayed. The gentle evening breeze played with his white beard, but his heart was filled with infinite sorrow, so that the words as they rose to his lips were broken by sobs. And away in the cold, grey distance of the sea the day lay dying.

“Come,” cried Gwennolé; and together they directed their horses’ steps toward the north. They climbed steep, billowy, brushwood slopes, plunged into the depths of dark ravines, peopled by monstrous boulders that in the half light resembled troops of petrified wild beasts.

They soon lost sight of the sea, but for a long, long while his terrible song pursued them, sounding through the great mists that followed in their wake. Sometimes in the midst of the savage noise a strident call would arise from the shore, and Gwennolé said, “It is the gulls returning to their nests!” but Gralon thought, “It was

even thus she screamed, as I tore her arms from around my neck," and under his breath he murmured, "Ahès ! alas, my Ahès !" At last they had travelled so far that even the moaning of the waters was left behind ; but still the salt breath of the ocean wrapped them round, mingling with the perfume of strange flowers, such as the old king fancied he had noticed in the golden hair of his daughter only the night before. He thought of her fair brow, smooth as young ivory, on which each morning he had been wont to set a kiss ; and he remembered how she used to smile up at him, how caressing she was, what light burned in the depths of her wonderful eyes.

Then again it was deep night, and the horses' hoofs sank in the soft moss of a forest, where high, black branches spread motionless, as though still sheltering the ancient Druid mysteries that so long held sway in these regions.

Suddenly, upon the edge of a clearing, they saw a bright light gleaming from the window of a hut ; for Primel the anchorite dwelt there—Primel, who was reported by some to have lived in the days of the Christ Himself !

" Let us rest till morning," said Gwennolé ; " we shall be safe under the protection of this holy man ; and I have a hope, oh king, that healing and peace may come to you from his presence."

He was seated at the end of the cabin, this Primel of whom the monk spoke. At the approach of the two travellers, he moved no more than if he had been a tree. His heavy cloth robe seemed to have become one with his flesh, so entirely did the wrinkled folds of the stuff

and the green mould with which in places it was stained resemble ancient bark growing upon the motionless, gnarled body of the hermit.

His head looked as though sculptured by the axe of some unskilled workman, some maker of barbarous idols. But ah ! what fairy fingers had curled and wound his hair, so fine that the spiders mistook it for their webs ?

From his shoulders spread two great branches that were his arms. Outward they stretched, as in benediction, and upon them the whole house rested. And the soles of his naked feet were flattened into the soil, while his nails had grown enormous, twisted, like roots many centuries old.

It was said of him that he lived after the manner of trees, on the juices of earth and the air of heaven ; it was thus that people accounted for his great age. Never had he been seen to take any food, so the peasants had given up bringing him offerings of milk and quarters of lamb, for he left the birds to drink the milk and the wolves to devour the lamb. He loved all creation with an immense, pervading love, men as well as brutes, never distinguishing the evil from the good. To him every living thing represented some element of order and beauty in the perfect universe of God.

Old as he was, his soul had remained crystal pure, no evil experiences had embittered him, and he still looked at the world with the wondering gaze of a little child. The extreme hopefulness of his race shone in his clear eyes, set in round orbits like the holes that woodpeckers bore in oak trees.

Upon entering, Gwennolé prostrated himself before the hermit, but Gralon sank down on a heap of dead leaves, blown into a corner of the hut, by the first winds of autumn. Scarcely had he dropped there when a strange drowsiness began to creep through his veins. Never had he felt such delicious repose, not even when, after some great battle charge, he had stretched himself luxuriously under the curtains of his bed at Ker-Is and drawn the soft skins of wild beasts around him.

The sad voice of his daughter, which had kept moaning in his ears, sank little by little into a vague minor chant, a slow, melancholy cradle-song that lapped his soul tenderly.

For a long, long time he seemed to see his body sleeping there, while he listened to the two saints murmuring the alternating verses of a prayer, that sounded as the noise of running waters answered by rowers' songs. And the horses were browsing under the stars without ; through the frame of the door he could see their vast shadows moving over the frosty grass. So the night passed away, and the grey dawn came.

Then Primel blessed his guests, and turning to Gralon, said—

“My son, when your heart is full of sorrow, take refuge in solitude. Forests above all are comforting to men who suffer. God made them to be a holy refuge, where peace can always be found. It is in the woodland that the harmony of the world can be most clearly realized.”

By evening that day the travellers alighted before



THE TOMB OF SAINT GWENOLE IN LANDEVENNEC ABBEY

the Abbey of Landévennec, built on a leafy shore, just where the Aulne empties itself into the rade of Brest. It was here that Gwennolé had settled his monks, finding the place propitious for prayer and meditation. The small community formed a kind of village or colony, half monastic, half agricultural, each monk having his separate cell, with a garden full of flowers, and a hive or two of bees.

Behind the little settlement rose the fair hills, kissed by the earliest beams of the morning sun, lighted by his latest glow. Flocks and herds were feeding on the slopes, tended by novices who, as they watched, studied parchment scrolls written in rude Gothic characters.

An arm of the sea encircled the abbey lands, and, after bathing the foot of the hill, turned abruptly to the east and thrust itself into the rocky depths of the Montagne Noire, its glittering curve recalling the flaming, twisted blade of the great archangel.

Towards the west the blue waters, broken here and there into tiny wavelets of shimmering gold, lay peaceful as an inland lake. But what gave the greatest charm of all to this oasis of verdure and still water was a certain formal row of vines, that shut off the view to the north. One pictured beyond some barren, wind-swept country, for ever beaten by the savage ocean, with a long line of granite coast, standing like a rampart against the tempestuous rage of the flood. Vainly might the wild Atlantic storms fling themselves against it as upon a giant wall, vainly might the huge, white-topped breakers rise above it, gleams of light sparkling

and dancing menacingly upon their snowy crests. The fancy added zest to this quiet nook, peopled only by monks, living a life of dreams. These calming influences were not long in working upon Gralon, whose old soul was soft as wax. Already past events were beginning to slip from his memory, when one winter night, as he was watching in his chamber, he heard a sweet voice singing. It could not possibly come from any of the monks' cells, for they had long since been closed for the night, and their inmates were asleep. Moreover, no monk, not even one of the young novices, could have sung with such feminine delicacy and grace. So bewitching was the strain that, like a subtle clue, it found its way into the innermost recesses of the old king's heart, so that pushing open the wooden shutters, he leaned out of the window, and turned his eyes seawards.

The water lay glistening in the moonshine, bright as silver, and from the pale sparkle of the waves rose the head and shoulders of a young girl. Among the long tresses of her floating hair precious stones were sparkling, unless indeed they were but the reflection of the stars. Her face lighted from above shone strangely, with a soft, ghostly splendour, in which her burning eyes glittered like two emeralds, and her lips as the petals of a mystic rose in the garden of the sea. Then Gralon, when he saw her, stretched out his arm, crying into space, "Ahès! . . . Ahès! . . ." for he had recognized his daughter; and still he called after her, even when, with the ease of a fish, she had swum away into the darkness. The two last lines of her song hung quivering in the air, and the moon bore them onward

in faint, slow vibrations, like the luminous notes of some great lyre—

“Ahès, brêman Mary Morgan,
E skeud an oabr, d'an noz, a gân.”*

It is a Celtic belief that a fairy lives in the sea, a fairy beautiful as an angel, but cruel as death itself. They say that she has the form and bosom of a maiden, but for the rest is a monster, covered with scales and ending in a fish's tail. Her beautiful form is seen rising above the water, on those still evenings that often precede great storms. Her loose hair floats over the waves, and from her lips rises a sweet, sad song, so full of passionate love that the very boats pause to listen. As for the sailors themselves, bewildered, fascinated, they cannot turn away their eyes from the enchantress, whose white arms beckon them. Then a madness seizes them, and, flinging off their clothes, all naked they plunge headlong in the waves to go to her. Meanwhile she watches them with her shining eyes, in which green flames are burning, and, as they reach her, strains them to her heart one by one, with the wild strength of an elemental force. Then the sky darkens, the clouds gather into the long, black folds of a funeral pall, the ocean swell hollows a bed in its yielding depths, and the great orchestra of the tempest sounds forth in all its horror.

The fairy loves these terrible surroundings to her wild love-making. Her kisses breathe so fierce a passion that her lovers die at once, as though poisoned.

* “Mary Morgan sings at midnight,
Sings within the silver moonlight.”

The mouth upon which hers has fastened suddenly detaches itself, withered, gaping, silent for ever. Along all the Breton coast there is not a family but has some murder with which to reproach her, and they call her Mary Morgan, Born of the Sea. She is one, yet many. Numberless have been her incarnations, yet the same sinful soul always reappears.

“Ahès, bréman Mary Morgan . . .”

And it was to this awful life of seduction and murder that Gralon had given his daughter for all eternity.

Throughout the night the mournful refrain kept sounding in his ears, awakening bitter memories, and to his other sorrows adding this new shame. His Ahès become an object of hate and loathing! Ahès, who for so long had been the joy of his eyes, who might have been the very flower of his race!

The following evening he saw the same apparition, heard the same song; and for many nights afterwards it continued, so that the poor old man no longer dared to stretch himself upon his couch. Broken at last by weariness and agony of mind—for the haunting image gave him not a moment's respite—he sank upon his knees beside the open casement, and in his turn implored mercy of his daughter.

“Have pity!” he murmured; “my last hour draws very near! Let me forget! Ah! suffer me to die in peace.”

But just as he had shown no pity to Ahès, so now the fairy of the waters had none for him. Then, at last, to escape from the horror, he resolved to fly so far

inland that the very breath of the dreadful sea could not reach him.

He took one of the sacks in which the peasants of that countryside used to bring offerings, and, having clothed himself with it, set forth at break of day, when all the monks of Landévennec were at Matins. Following the course of the river Aulne, he came at last to the ferry of Térénières, over which he was taken by the little daughter of the ferryman. When she landed him upon the farther bank, he blessed her, and intoned a prayer for her in his sorrowful voice. She took him for some beggar going his rounds, the great chief of Cornouailles, this man who had built Ker-Is, uniting on his brow all the crowns of Armorica! After climbing the hill of Roznöen, he went into a cottage that stood by the roadside. Said the woman to him: "We give alms only on a Saturday, my good man, because then it is the eve of the blessed Sabbath. Still, here is a crêpe for you, and some bacon, for you seem very weary."

So, thanking her, he took the food, and as his old legs were sinking beneath him, asked permission to rest on the doorstep for a little while. . . .

About dusk he passed through the town of Faou. His cousin, and lieutenant, had a castle there, and was giving a great entertainment. All the windows were blazing with light, and sounds of merriment could be heard within. Gralon seated himself upon a stone, near the door by which the guests passed in and out, but servants came and drove him away, and he never told them who he was, but submitted meekly to the insult. Was it not all a change, something that took his

thoughts away from that one fixed, torturing remembrance?

Now, on the right, a valley opened, and the king, turning, passed into it. The path wound upwards, shaded by slender branches between which the moon shone, embroidering the ground with clear, delicate tracery. Then came lofty forests, slender, mossy pillars supporting great, shadowy domes, all the mystery of an empty church. Night! Every sound had died away into the distance, even the persistent murmur of the sea.

Gralon thought of the words of Primel the anchorite: "The forests are comforting to men who suffer; God made them to be a holy refuge." His troubled brow cleared, his heart was full of peace, as though an insurmountable barrier shut him off from the rest of the world. And still he kept advancing, longing to bathe, nay even to lose himself in this quiet place, to feel more and more at each step the protection of all the forest things that were thickening around him. The avenue down which he was walking was wide as the nave of a great church, and as he noted the springing arches of the boughs, he thought within himself: "If it is God's wish that I should live for a few years longer, I will take this forest as my model, and here on this spot will I raise a cathedral, with as many stone columns as now I see tree trunks. Not one poor soul in all Brittany but shall here, like myself, find healing and consolation."

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Meanwhile, Gwennolé, greatly disturbed by the disappearance of the king, set forth in quest of him. After a long, long search he found him in the retreat he had chosen for himself, at the entrance to the forest of

Kranou. There he lay, stretched on a bed of moss, over which fallen leaves lay like golden tears. Near him something human was crouching, something that had scarcely the appearance of being alive.

Seeing the monk approach, his white cloth gown contrasting sharply with the sombre shadows of the wood, Gralon raised himself with an effort.

"You come just in time to receive my last breath," he said. "Be not harsh with the old man yonder. He has lived for three ages, and has known all the depths of suffering. The ills that I have endured are as nothing to the agonies through which he has passed. I have had to mourn for my ruined city, for the awful fate of my only child ; but he—ah, he has lost his gods ! What sorrow can compare with this sorrow ? Once he was a Druid ; now he mourns a dead religion. Be gentle with him, oh, Gwennoilé. He will tell you of my last wish, my great vow, and how dear this place has grown to me—this place, where I have had a foretaste of the joy of being no more. To your hands I commend my soul, purified at last from the memories that so long have troubled it." . . .

Then his head fell back motionless on the grass, and the King of Cornouailles was dead.

Gwennoilé began murmuring Latin psalms, and the Druid, in a quavering voice, intoned a dirge in some barbarous tongue, while Gralon, great Chief of the Sea, lay in the glade till morning, watched over by the priest of the Christ and the last worshipper of Teutatès. Strange thoughts must have haunted the souls of these two men. Perchance the presence of that silent form sufficed to bridge over the gulf that lay between them,

so that above the king's body, in the deep melancholy of that night of death, these ancient cults took one another by the hand, and held communion with the dead under the majestic roof of the forest.

At daybreak a troop of monks appeared, whom Gwennolé had commanded to follow him. They washed the remains of the chief in the neighbouring fountain, wound him in a piece of linen perfumed with vervain, and took him upon their shoulders, to bear him to Landévennec, where in a ruined crypt his sepulchre may still be seen.

When they had disappeared, the Druid spoke—

"Brother (for are we not sprung from common ancestors?), he whom we have just led to the threshold of the other world asked me to make known to you his last wishes. I promised him to go, if necessary, even to your house, though I am forbidden by the rules of my religion to cross the enchanted boundary of the forest. This is what he wished you to do: he desired that under your direction a church should be raised on this spot to the Sorrowful Mother of your God, so that sick persons should there find health, and the heavy-laden, peace.

"There was once a time—I was young then—when a block of red granite stood here. Its touch gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, hope to hearts in distress. May the sanctuary that you raise inherit the same virtues; it is my wish—the wish of one conquered, but resigned to the changing order of the times, one who feels neither bitterness nor hatred. I have spoken."

For a moment or two Gwennolé remained thinking, his eyes fixed on the ground.



THE TOMB OF KING GRALON AT LANDEVENNEC

"But if we do this thing," he cried at last, moved in spite of himself by the perfect serenity of the Druid, "we shall disturb you—you, whose last refuge we shall be invading!"

"Oh, *me!*" . . . answered the old man; and after a pause, he added, with a gesture of weariness and discouragement, "After all, it is the duty of my gods to protect me, if they really exist, and are able to do anything for me." Then, pointing up to the blue sky, fresh with the clear pale light of an October morning, he said, "In the furthest depths of that majesty we find on high, perchance there is nothing but a great mistake."

Thoroughly scandalized, Gwennolé replied sternly. "To believe is to know."

But he softened again immediately, full of compassion for this ancient man, last remnant of a mighty, sombre creed.

"Why will you not come with me to my abbey?" he asked; "we have a pleasant cell for guests, and we would teach you the Word of Life."

"Ah, but I love my woodland paths better!" answered the Druid; "they are familiar to me. Moreover, do not all Tracks lead to the same Great Centre? One thing only I ask of you. When your workmen come to build the church, if they find my body rotting on the ground, tell them to bury it. Farewell!"

He turned his back, and, leaning on his knotted staff, passed feebly away down the long avenue, while Gwennolé, his heart sad and softened, he knew not why, went slowly off towards the sea.

CHAPTER II

I HAVE ventured to give the legend at some length. Gralon's vow was accomplished, and a church was raised on the site he had chosen. Three valises full of gold, saved from the wreck of Ker-Is, scarcely sufficed to cover the cost of the building, which contained, so says tradition, as many stone columns as the country of Rumengol had trees. The present church is but a poor imitation of it ; but as the proverb says, "It will not do to judge of the miracles by the size of the church." The humble chapel of to-day has the same reputation among Bretons as had the magnificent erection of the past. People flock to it the whole year round, coming from all sides, from the interior of the country, and from the coast.

One August evening I found myself landed at Cloître-Plourin, a little wayside station on the line to Carhaix. It lies lost in the midst of a marshy plateau, a region of empty peat-holes, broken here and there by black, leprous patches and unwholesome mirrors of stagnant water. Not a house to be seen save the station ! I was on my way to visit "Les Kragou," a line of stone breakers whose strange crests bristle along the west of the Mountains of Aré.

I took the only road I could find, a primitive route enough, just a couple of deep ruts enclosing a grassy

path, the kind of track down which, according to Breton belief, the Cart of Death is accustomed to make its way.

A little before me walked an old woman, a poor creature with a halting gait. Her feet were shod with men's heavy shoes, and her form was so bent that her long arms seemed to grow out of her waist.

As I overtook her, I gave her a Breton "Good day," to which she responded with a voice that had a youthful, silvery ring in it. I have often noticed that our Breton peasant women retain a certain childish charm to extreme old age.

It was quite evident that she was pleased to meet some human being in that vast solitude. The sombreness of her surroundings had begun to affect her, and the painful impression was increased by the melancholy twilight, so that no doubt she was feeling that vague terror which in our western districts always comes with evening. She began to talk at once, expressing the hope that we should go a long way together.

"I am very anxious," said she, "to reach the town of Berrien before the lights are put out. Unfortunately, I am no longer so active as I used to be; in fact, I move like a log."

I noticed the neck of a bottle peeping out of an apron pocket.

"No doubt you are a pilgrim?" said I.

"Yes," said she; "I am. Years ago, when I was stronger, I was constantly to be seen travelling about the roads. But I am getting very feeble; I am nearly eighty years old, and in truth I ought to be at rest in my house in the churchyard. But I still have to work,

you see, for one must earn one's living even to the end."

And then she told me that she was going to Rumengol, by way of Berrien and Commana, right across that mountainous country. Already she had been travelling for two days, having come all the way from Plounévez-Moédec, in Côtes-du-Nord, near by the forest of Coat-an-Noz. She was on her way to pray to the Virgin of "Tout-Remède (as they call our Lady of Rumengol) for the speedy release of a dying neighbour, who was suffering great agony without being able to expire.

With the intention of keeping me as long as possible by her side, she began telling me of the solemn rites she had to perform when once she reached the end of her pilgrimage.

First, she would kneel before the porch, above which (as she informed me) Gralon is represented, imploring the special tenderness of the Mother of all Christendom on behalf of the Breton people. Then, three times, barefoot, her shoes in her hand, she would make the tour of the chapel, walking face to the sun, and reciting in Breton a very ancient ballad, known under the name of "The Dream of the Virgin":—

"Lady Mary the fair in her bed lay sleeping
When a dream to her came;
Her Son was passing and passing before her,
And gazed straight in her face."

She repeated the whole prayer to me, an exquisite thing, filled with almost Galilean simplicity.

Then would come the prayers in the church. The good old soul would light a candle in front of the sacred



THE SOUTH DOOR OF RUMENGOL CHURCH

image, let it burn for a moment, then suddenly extinguish it, in order to let the Glorious Mary know what particular kind of service was required of her, and it was to be hoped that far off in Plounévez-Moédec the dying friend would breathe her last at that particular moment. If not, there was still a resource. My old friend would go to the holy fountain, fill her bottle, and on her return scatter a few drops of the water upon the eyelids of the sufferer. Immediately her eyeballs would turn in their sockets, and pain cease with life.

"It is the fifty-sixth time that I have made this pilgrimage," she continued, "and for fifty-six different cases. There is no favour that Rumengol does not grant; it cures ills of the soul as well as those of the body. Gralon's was the first miracle. He was haunted by the demon of his daughter Ahè, and could not sleep. Our Lady set him free." . . .

Once started on her favourite theme, the old woman was going straight on, but we had reached the slope of "Les Kragou."

"Ah, you are going to the rocks!" she exclaimed, with a slight shudder. "Well, may God protect you! My way is down this road."

And she disappeared gradually into a fold of the mountain. Upon reaching the summit, I scrambled on to one of the great stones, from whence I could see the poor old creature, hastening along with her hobbling gait, through the grey fall of dusk. Two leagues away to the south, over a desert of peat-bog, a spire pointing upwards from a grove of trees scattered a melancholy tinkling through the quiet air. The Angelus was sounding at Berrien.

CHAPTER III

IT was the first week of June, the sweet hay-making month. The six-o'clock train, crowded with passengers, had just entered Quimper station. All along the route from Lorient it had been collecting pilgrims. Through doors and windows they could be seen, quietly seated, with serious, meditative faces. There were people from Vannes, Gwénédours, with straight, smooth hair, and strong, roughly sculptured features; men of Scaër, with fine, broad shoulders, their black waistcoats braided with velvet; youths from Elliant, fixed in their stiff collars, and representations of the Holy Sacrament embroidered on their backs. Many women there were; some withered with age, cadaverous of hue, their figures broadened by hard work in the fields and constant maternity; some, exquisitely fresh, pure flowers of love, the wings of their coifs floating out like white petals.

In the waiting-room, groups were stationed before the gates—peasants from the outskirts of Quimper, people from Kerfeunteun and Ergué, from Plomelin, and from Fouesnant. Supplementary carriages were added, and immediately taken by assault. Then the train moved on again, a caravan of the faithful, growing with each station at which it stopped.

With great difficulty I had squeezed myself into a compartment occupied chiefly by soldiers, young Breton



PEASANTS FROM THE OUTSKIRTS OF QUIMPER



conscripts, shaved for the first time, their hands still rough from the plough, rustic even in their uniform.

They had had the good fortune not to be sent out of the country, and had found their garrison close to their homes. So they were making use of a twenty-four hours' leave to go to Rumengol, led no doubt by a feeling of devotion, but also because they knew that there they would meet their relations, their friends, and very likely their sweethearts. This prospect, added to the sensation that they had regained their liberty for a short time, had overexcited some of them. But it was a passing intoxication that soon evaporated. With the Breton, merriment has but a short life, and dies away almost as soon as it is born. The young men chatted among themselves, making little arrangements under their breath, till at last, invited by the others, one of them rose—a youth, almost a boy. From the delicate lines of his face, from his fine eyes, the colour of scorched grass, I guessed him to be some mountain shepherd.

After having reflected for a moment, he broke forth with a clear voice, tuned to resound through wide spaces, not into a mess-room ballad, as one might have expected, but into a strange, mystical song with a drooping rhyme, the well-known canticle of "Our Lady of Rumengol"—

" Lili, arc'hantet ho delliou,
War vord an dour'zo er prajou ;
Douè d'ezho roas dillad
A skuill er meziou peb c'houèz vad. . . . " *

* " The lilies with their silver leaves
Border the streamlets in the meadows ;
God gave them their fair clothing,
Their sweet scent that is wafted far over the land. . . . "

The soldiers repeated each verse, giving it a mighty volume of sound, and the song flew away behind us, carried on a current of speed, along with the great white clouds of steam that lay on either side of the train.

It was a religious eclogue, softly flowering, full of the double perfume of nature and piety. There in the close atmosphere of the railway-carriage, where we sat packed together, without light or air, it called up visions of shining meadows, of wooded glades, of waters running in the depths of valleys, and of a church with a grey clock-tower, embroidered over with yellow lichens.

Everything that we saw in the country through which we were passing added to this impression of rustic freshness—the green, undulating plain of Cornouailles, the rich splendour of its pasturage, the sparkle of its rivers, the blue rampart of its hills, through the mist of whose outlines a great shaft of gold fell from the setting sun ; while over all was the light clear sky, full of warm breezes and the quickening breath of the sea.

We mount ! we mount !

A line of bare and rugged heights arises, crowned with pyramids of heaped-up stones, the cairns of long-past ages. A sheet of water, a canal, reflects their huge profiles ; and on its shores white houses stand peacefully, their fronts a little darkened by the reflection of the slate quarries that are everywhere. It is Châteaulin, a “sous-préfecture” of Arcadia. We cross the canal by a viaduct, and for a moment the eye follows the harmonious curves of the valley, down which the dull azure scar unwinds itself towards the virgin solitudes, where Landévennec stands on its point of land.

The Aulne once passed, we enter upon a new scene. No more those barren summits, no more the joyous, smiling aspect of southern Cornouailles. It is a region of bare plateaux, this, separated by deep ravines, as that of Pont-ar-Veuzèn, or by melancholy combes like Lopérec. The whole aspect of the country is indescribably grave and solemn, suggestive already of Léon.

At a small station in the midst of this bare country the train stops, and an official cries—

“ Quimerc’h ! Passengers for Rumengol alight here ! ”

Then the carriages give forth a moving, silent, many-coloured multitude. It is nearly half-past eight ; the sky, milky white, is peopled by a procession of clouds, moving in our direction. The pilgrims scatter out along the steep road, bordered here and there by inns. On a shelf stands the town of Quimerc’h, moved to this spot since the opening of the railway—a few miserable houses gathered around a new church. It seems out of place, this improvised village, standing on granite steps, built for all eternity, in the midst of the great solemn landscape.

Beyond the town the hill begins again, and the arms of a calvary stand out against the deep sky, still lighted by the sunset. From the foot of the cross may be seen one of the fairest views in all Brittany. Below, lies a soft, seductive country, in whose depths a cluster of pointed roofs is nestling, a theatrical old town of the Middle Ages.

To the left, grey fleeting glimpses of distant hills, scarcely more than stationary clouds, which yet are the crests of Ménez Hom ; and still further, the trident,

which the promontory of Crozon plants on the sea, the three-fingered hand with which it probes the depths of the Atlantic.

To the right is the Rade, called by the Bretons "The Enclosed Sea," an ocean arm reaching into a bosom of ploughed land and forests. Cold and clear it lies, a frozen gleam of sleeping water, still quivering a farewell to the vanished sun ; a place where winds come to die with a last faint shudder.

Near at hand, a deep ravine, full of green shadow, and on the far side of it, the brown saddle of Hanvec land, bearing on its flank the little Breton Mecca, the holy oasis of Rumengol.

CHAPTER IV

I WAS just about to take to the deep road that, crossing the valley, leads straight to the sacred village, when I met the conscript once more, the good-looking shepherd soldier.

He was seated on the edge of the path, and had just taken off his shoes, tied them together by their laces, and turned his red trousers up above his fine calves. We exchanged a look, a few words, and I complimented him on his beautiful voice.

"Yes," said he, "it is a lovely canticle. I learned it when I went to catechism. I like humming it when I am in barracks. There is never very much need to press me to sing it wherever I may be. People who come from our part to the Pardon of Rumengol, chant it all along the road. . . . I come from Saint Riwal, you know, in the Ménez. It is a poor place ; too many stones and furze bushes, very little rye and black corn. But there is never any land so dear to the heart, so sweet to the eyes, as that in which one is born."

His companions had stopped to drink at one of the inns, and while we were walking on together, he explained to me that he was the fifth child in his family, and told me about his father, his mother, and his sister, who was married to a peat-cutter of the Yeûn. He spoke of his godmother, too, who was well off, and had promised, when he had finished his service, to make him

a present of a pair of oxen, so as to set him up in housekeeping. For as soon as he was settled at home again, he meant to take a wife. He was in love with a girl of Braspartz, and though he had never said a word to her on the matter, he had dreamed of no one else for the last three years. He had met her one day at a Pardon held at the ruined chapel of Saint Kaduan. It was just such an evening as this. He had gone there to fill up the time, and also, of course, from a feeling of piety. Even when saints have lost their chapels one ought to go to their *fêtes* !

There were a good many young people gathered together on the green sward, but he saw only one, who smiled as she looked at him ; and in a moment his fate was sealed—he had, as he expressed it, “found his star.” Since then the girl had remained shining in the pure sky of his memory. It was the eternal poem of Breton love, sober and chaste as you find it in our songs, as still it flourishes in the heart of our race. Nothing is there of passion, nothing disquieting ; only a tenderness that leavens all the soul, mingled with some deeper emotion of which I cannot speak. They love as they pray, these Bretons—thoughtfully, and in silence.

The deep road through which we were walking sank between high, ruinous banks, and the branches joined overhead, forming a trellis-work. In the ditches, water-plants brushed against each other with a clear, whispering sound, the tiny, delicate song of invisible streamlets. There was not a breath of wind ; the very leaves slept or rather hung, with the expectant air that motionless things sometimes take upon them.

A few cows were feeding by the roadside, and we met a cart or two crowded with peasants, who had already finished their devotions, and were returning homewards. . . . A woman wearing the Pleyben cap, and all uncovered at the neck, passed us, running, her feet bleeding, her breath failing her.

"She must have made some very great vow," observed the conscript.

He had just cut himself a pilgrim-staff from a hazel tree, and was carefully stripping off the bark with the point of his knife, so making a kind of *thyrsus*, garlanded with a thin green ribbon, where letters interlaced.

And now, all at once, the prospect widens ; the hedges open out like the doors of a church, and we enter a footpath that runs between sweet-scented banks of golden genista. We have left the shadows of evening behind us, and a mysterious light, infinitely delicate in tone, remains in front, reflected from the distant mirror of the ocean. In this supernatural radiance, Rumengol stands forth with all the clearness of an Eastern village, painted in impossible, fairy-like colours. The spire of the church shines bright rose, as though carved from the Red Stone of long ago, forming a centre round which all the country lies prostrate in mute adoration. In truth, everything lies, or kneels, in an attitude of prayer, and from fields, moorland, meadows, a soft murmur arises, moving one's heart, like the subtle fragrance of old, forgotten prayers, so that I find myself humming, along with the conscript, those verses of the canticle :—

"Lili, arc'hantet ho délliou. . . ."

Just then, from a neighbouring clearing, came another

refrain of quite a different character, shouted by a company of drunken sailors—"bluejackets" who had come to the Pardon by boat, and were dancing a wild *ronde* arm-in-arm before a sailcloth drinking-booth—

"Entre Brest et Lorient,
Leste, leste.
Entre Brest et Lorient,
Lestement.

"Les gabiers de la misaine
Sont des filles de quinze ans . . .
Entre Brest et Lorient
Leste, leste. . ."

Very "leste," in fact, was this jovial song, rather profane too, and very much out of place in this solemn country, so suggestive of prayer and meditation.

I said something of the kind to my companion, thinking that the rude sounds, which even to me seemed inopportune, must be still more painful to him, with his deep religious feelings. But he did not seem in the least shocked; on the contrary, it was he, the believer, who gave me a lesson in tolerance.

"Oh, well," said he, "they are singing as well as they can. What does it matter what they sing, if only they sing? The Virgin of Rumengol is not so particular as all that. She hears the sound of their voices, and that is all she wants. They have taken a great deal of trouble to please her; for they have come all the way from Landévennec or Recouvrance to pay her a visit on her own land, in her own church. She says to herself, 'Here they are again, these honest boys of the navy,' and she is delighted to see them once more, as



OUR LADY OF RUMINGOI

well and as good-tempered as ever. As for how they behave, she cares nothing for that ; she is just a real mother, not a prude. You take a good look at her by-and-by, and notice how she seems to welcome you, as she stands there in her golden robe. She wants to comfort us, not to scold or be angry with us. She has a smile on her lips, and she wishes us all to be merry in our hearts. Her best beloved are those who bring her some song or other, for she loves songs ; that is why her *fête* is called the Pardon of the Singers !”

And so, bold sailors, go on your way cheerfully, and may our Lady of Rumengol keep you happy !

As we neared the booth the singers noticed us, and called out to the soldier—

“Hello, Red Breeches ; come and have a drink !”

A young girl in a velvet bodice was pouring cider out of a full jar, and “Red Breeches” left me, to sit down under the night sky with that party of tipsy blue-jackets. As I went on down the path, the endless song that had stopped for a moment, broke out once more louder than ever ; only now, among the drunken voices of the sailors, another sounded, rising high above them, a pure chorister’s voice, wonderfully true and sweet, which at each repetition of the refrain soared aloft like a rocket, scattering notes into space, clear as a lark’s song :—

“Entre Brest et Lorient,
Leste, leste ;
Entre Brest et Lorient,
Lestement. . .”

As the distance increased, I was no longer able to hear the words distinctly, which no doubt was the

reason that, as the song grew fainter and more faint, I found a certain charm about it that increased as I proceeded, transfiguring and idealizing it. Now it rhymed my steps, rocked my soul, led me to holy dreams. Had it ceased altogether, the poetry of that sweet evening would not have seemed so perfect.

The shelters of coarse sacking were growing more and more numerous along the edge of the road, and in a few of them burned little tallow candles set in glasses. On the other side of the river that wound along the bottom of the valley they formed quite a street, as they mounted the opposite slope. The meadow mists wrapped them round, rising into the air like a procession of spirits, trailing long muslin robes behind them. Within, people were talking briskly, embracing each other across the tables, exchanging a thousand demonstrations of friendship. There were little groups too, of men, stooping over fire-baskets to light their tiny pipes; when a jet of flame shone on their faces, their freshly shaven chins, they broke together into a great laugh that made the echoes resound in the far-off depths of the night. On the footpath the crowd was already solid. Here and there a space was left in the moving throng, where some beggar, seated on the ground like a tailor or Buddha, bellowed his "complainte" as he shook his amulets, a whole bunch of which hung from his neck. Every one moved aside for him with superstitious reverence, throwing a piece of money into his begging-bowl. They say that the poor of Rumengol form quite a caste by themselves, a race endowed with most extraordinary powers. The spirit of the ages dwells in them; they move freely about in the realms

of the past, and reach far forward into the mysteries of the future. There are some among them who have lived through many incarnations, and whose memory has grown to be a storehouse of the greatest secrets of the ancients. The vanished race of magicians and enchanters has bequeathed *their position* to them, along with their arts and formulæ. They know how to cure with a word, to slay with a look; no luck is there for him who fails to pay them the respect which is their due.

People will tell you the story of a peasant of Laz who, having hit one of these beggars, was seven years before he could return to his cottage in the mountains. Whichever path he took always led him back to Rumengol, and he walked so far that at last he had no flesh on the soles of his feet. When at length, the charm having come to an end, he found himself before his own door, his wife was just about to have a baby by a second husband.

And they will tell you the following story, which is no less curious:—

One evening, not very long ago, a young girl was returning to Logonna, from the Pardon. For a wonder it began to rain,* so she opened her umbrella. Suddenly, a man rose up from the ditch, a very old man, whose back was bent beneath a great harvest of years. He was dressed in sordid rags, yet on one of the fingers of his left hand shone an emerald.

"Young lady," said he, addressing the girl, "if you will kindly allow me to walk under your umbrella, I shall reach my home without being soaked to the skin.

* I was told that "It is always fine for the Pardon of Rumengol."—(F.M.G.)

I live only a pipe's distance from here,* you will not have to put up with me for long."

He spoke so humbly that the young girl was touched.

"Come, and welcome!" said she.

So they went along side by side, under the shower that now fell with double violence, the girl sheltering the old man as well as she could. In spite of his great age he walked at a good pace, easily and lightly, as though the wind-beaten lappets of his vest served him in place of wings.

"You are a pretty child," said he, "and what is of more consequence, you seem to be a good child. I had a daughter once who was very much like you, about your age and height, and like you also she had fair hair, the colour of ripe corn. I loved her with all my soul. But she was not good as you are, the thirst for forbidden things inflamed her heart, her eyes, her lips. She was the sorrow of my life; she is my shame through all eternity."

He was silent, and down his sad face the tears went coursing. Then fear took hold on the girl, as though she were in the presence of some supernatural being. After a moment he spoke again.

"I should like to give you this emerald by way of thanks; but it was once hers, and would only bring you bad luck. Moreover, the blessing of our Lady of Rumengol is upon you; that is worth more than all the gems in the world." Then, pausing near an opening in the hedge, he added, "My way lies here; may the Angel of Safe Journeys go with you!"

She saw him disappear into the shadows, and heard

* The time it takes to smoke a pipe.

his heavy sobs. Almost at the same moment, beyond the misty coast-line, a great white form arose in the direction of the sea. Quickly the girl closed her eyelids, and crossed herself three times, to drive the evil influence of Mary Morgan away from her and hers.

On reaching home, she told her friends of this strange incident of her pilgrimage, and after the elders had kept a constrained silence for some time, one of them murmured—

“Before beginning the evening prayer, let us say a *De Profundis* for the repose of the soul of King Gralon.”

One can easily understand that legends such as these—and there is a whole cycle of them—add not a little to the notion that the beggars of Rumengol are sacred, mystical beings. And then, too, these “seekers of alms” are seen in that particular place only once a year; they come from Heaven knows where, from all kinds of districts, lying at great distances apart, and consequently a mystery encompasses them, leaving plenty of scope for fancies of every description. I have met women of Trégor, at Pardons, thirty, even forty leagues from home—women whose faces I have known from childhood. After the lapse of many years I have found them again, just such as I remembered them, without one extra wrinkle, their skin blackened and smoke-dried as the skin of a mummy, their thin, pardon-going legs still quick and active, their bloodshot eyes shining with the same obstinate, silent fanaticism.

Finally, there is not one of these Rumengol beggars who has not his own particular style of beauty. Looking at them, one is almost forced to believe that the

brotherhood of rogues and vagabonds only send their most remarkable and striking specimens, their most interesting, perfect types, to this Pardon. I have seen some, wrapping themselves in their tatters with the unconscious majesty of barbaric chieftains.

I remember to have stood before one, lost in admiration. He looked a shepherd of men. He was sitting on the edge of the fountain at the entrance to the village. His legs were crossed, his body bent forward, and his hands rested on a chestnut staff thick as the trunk of a young tree. The bare crown of his head shone like a brazen mirror in the light of the stars. From his temples to his shoulders fell locks of fine, yellow-white hair, half moonlight, half sunshine; and in this frame was a profile statuesque as that of some ancient image, arched nose, prominent cheek-bones, grey eyebrows shadowing bright, eager eyes, lips lost beneath the soft flow of a silver beard. His bowl, placed on the ground at his feet, seemed waiting rather for offerings than for alms. His whole personality inspired awe in the beholder, and I noticed that the pilgrims, as they made their libations at the fountain, showed a veneration for him mingled with fear, as though he had been, if not the god, at least the guardian priest of the fountain.

"Who is that poor old man?" I asked of a passer-by.

"Neither I nor any one else can tell you that. He is called Pôtr he groc'hen gawr, the man with the goat-skin, because of that half-dressed hide which you see over his back, giving him a look of Saint John the Baptist. Nobody knows anything more about him, and probably no one ever will, for either he is, or pretends to

be, so deaf that it is quite impossible to question him. There are some who say he is a saint, and some a sorcerer ; the first are led away by the fact that he can repeat the Mass in Latin as well as any bishop ; the latter say what they do because no one knows anything against him ; he does not even get drunk like his brethren with the coppers he collects. He appears regularly on the eve of the Pardon, always seats himself in the same place, passes the night as you see him now, whatever the weather may be, and next morning, having saluted the Virgin, takes his departure on his Wandering Jew's journey across the country."

CHAPTER V

THE only street of Rumengol, bordered on one side by a dozen houses, on the other by the church-yard wall, was blocked with booths as I entered it—open stalls, where, in the light of lamps or torches, rosaries sparkled along with medals, rings, and glittering favours ; while sacred pictures and cloth scapularies waved softly in the evening breeze. Troops of peasant women were standing in ecstasy before these marvels, but the men made a circle round the game of *Mil ha kaz* (a kind of roulette), very popular in Brittany, while others joined in the rough exercise of "Turk's head."

It was no easy matter for me to make my way through all these stationary people, for a Breton, when once he has taken up a position, never moves, unless absolutely pushed aside. And this is especially the case at fair-time ; he then seems as though carved out of stone, and any one can walk right over him without his budging an inch.

However, by means of working steadily away with my elbows, I finished by reaching the inn that had been recommended to me. It was that which stands at the end of the village, a couple of steps from the church. Its narrow granite windows were blazing forth from its dark, low-browed face. A fiery, purple glow lighted the ground-floor, and quick flashes came and went, dancing

and sparkling like meteors over the joists of the roof. In the chimney the flame grew into an immense red sheaf, and from the depths of the saucepans came heavy, rapid sounds, like the rush of a rising tide.

In this furnace of a place I found about fifty human beings, crowded one upon another, supping to their hearts' content, never dreaming of taking their food out into the fresh night to eat it on the neighbouring banks.

A few of them even had to sit on the floor, their plates between their knees, but they were not in the least put out or uncomfortable. A pilgrim is not a commercial traveller. He just sits down where he finds room, takes what is given to him, and pays what he is asked with a cheerful "Thank you."

Well, I myself have come to Rumengol as a literary pilgrim, and am not inclined to be exacting, but I do like the end of a form to sit upon, and I prefer it near some hole through which I can breathe.

"Go upstairs," says the hostess to me.

A low room, with no other furniture than a table of planks, resting on empty casks by way of trestles. In order to reach their plates the guests are obliged to remain standing. Those who have finished, or who have not yet got their food, fill up the time of waiting by monotonous games of cards. Whenever a fist falls on the ill-adjusted planks the plates tip up, and all the glasses give a jump. There is a loud sound of talking, and a sour smell of spilt cider greets one's nose on entering, for already signs of drunkenness are in the air.

The little servant who has been sent with me pushes open a door at the end of the room, and shows me a retreat where there is a real table, and (God forgive me !)

chairs. Here, at last, everything is peaceful and quiet. The lattice opens over a field, beyond which lies the valley, covered with a great bridal veil that the mysterious water-sprites have spread over the poplars and willows. I should never have dreamed of finding such a quiet corner, and am just about to fall to, on the plate of stew that smokes before me, when a loud snore comes from one of the dark corners of the room, warning me that I am to have both company and music at my dinner.

"Oh, it is nothing," whispers the girl. "It is only the Song Man. He laid himself down there to get a nap; he won't trouble you in the least;" and after this lucid explanation off she runs.

But come, think I, it would be as well to have a look at this Song Man! so I make my way to the side of the sleeper.

He is lying at full length on the floor, face to the wall, his head on a knapsack bursting with papers. Now, either I am very much mistaken, or I have seen this same old calfskin knapsack before. A flood of memories rushes over me at the very sight of it, calling up before my eyes Trégor, my native land. Yes, yes, it must be he!

I lower the candle towards the man's face; he moves a little, and with a cry I recognize him—

"Yann Ar Minouz!"

No doubt the strange-sounding name means nothing to you, but remember it nevertheless, for it is that of our last native Bard. Alas! I ought to say, It WAS—for Yann Ar Minouz is no longer among us. I saw by the papers that he died at Pleumeur-Gautier, nearly a

year ago, in the fifty-seventh year of his age. Surely it will not be out of place here, if I speak of him at some length, for he was the favourite rhymster of all the regular Rumengol pilgrims ; they still mourn him. In the words of an old woman, who never passes my door without knocking—

“He shone out among other singers like a gold piece among coarse halfpence.”

But it is round about Tréguier, Lannion, Paimpol, that he has left the saddest void.

With him died the muse of wandering poets, a good girl, rather Bohemian in her tastes, not particularly neat in her dress, and scarcely choice enough about the selection of her subjects ; but bold and industrious, with a quick foot and ready tongue. It was her cheerful, nasal voice that led the pilgrims all across the peninsula.

Heaven preserve me from introducing Yann Ar Minouz to you as the equal of the Liwarc’h-hens, or the Taliésinns of our land !* He would not wish me to do so, he who so readily exaggerated the pretensions of others.

His muse was not one that flew very high, neither was he altogether original. But if he did not revive the school of great bards in our midst, he at least prolonged its death agony. He spoke of himself as a Bard, innocently enough, having chosen the word by chance, without going into the question of its real meaning ; and a Bard in truth he was, both from taste and temperament. He often used to say to me—

“I have never been anything but a singer of songs, and I shall be so as long as I live. People have wanted

* Celebrated Celtic bards.

to teach me all sorts of trades, but I was made wrong for everything except to be a maker of verses; that is the only thing I really enjoy, the only thing I can do properly. When I was a child I was set to look after cows, but one morning when a great breeze was blowing I left the beasts to take care of themselves, and set off to see where the wind came from. That was the year after my first communion. Ever since then I have spent my time running about the country. I eat when any one gives me anything, and I sleep where they let me. But I prefer the inn of La Belle Étoile to any closed-in house, just as I like the singing of birds better than the talking of men."

Being near Pleumeur last vacation, I went to see his widow, Marie-Françoise Le Moullec, and we had a long talk about the dead man, lying so near us, under the shadow of the church in the peaceful graveyard.

Yann first saw the light at Lézardrieux, and his father, who could read, was considered so highly educated, that beside being a weaver, he filled the position of village schoolmaster. His daily task of weaving over, he gathered round him a dozen little boys of the neighbourhood, and instructed them; that is to say, he taught them their catechism, and how to find their places in the different services of the prayer-book, cramming their heads meanwhile with old ballads that set forth the failings of former noblemen, or celebrated the virtues of local saints. This elementary style of education suited Yann to a marvel. He made such rapid progress that his father thought to make him a priest, and sent him to Pleumeur, where there was a regular certificated schoolmaster. So Yann was initiated into

French, and even a little Latin. But he soon had enough of that kind of life ; no one sang Breton songs at the Pleumeur school, so he ran away, and one fine morning his father found him asleep in the stable.

"What are you doing here ? " he inquired angrily.

"You had all gone to bed when I came home last night, and I didn't like to wake you."

"You have a holiday to-day, then ? "

"No, but I am not going back there ; I don't like it. If you make me go I shall only run away again, and you won't see me any more."

They did everything they could think of to move the child, but in vain. Threats, blows, entreaties, were not of the least avail.

"Well," said his parents, "at all events, you shall earn your living ; " and they hired him out to a farmer of Saint Drien. From dawn to dusk he was set to look after cows, bulls, and heifers, in the midst of the boundless country. But, as a matter of fact, he passed the time sitting between a couple of gorse bushes, listening to a mysterious bird that had begun singing in his head, or picturing imaginary landscapes, to which so strong a longing drew him, that he got pins and needles in his legs with thinking about them. It was there, in the quiet of that melancholy moorland, that the spirit of primitive poetry came to him for the first time.* He was about twelve years old when he composed his first poem, the same that he afterwards rewrote and called

* The Rector of Pleumeur, M. Barra, gave him his first lessons in Breton metre. "Be a Bard," said this old man to Yann, "after that of a priest, I know of no more delightful calling."

"Confession de Jean Gamin." It ran something like this :—

"I am an impudent, naughty little boy,
Caring for nothing save playing with my peg-top,
I keep away from school as much as ever I can,
And go bird's-nesting, fighting, and scrambling about.

"My vest is torn, my stockings are in rags,
As for my trousers, they will scarcely hold together ;
Through using it to beat my friends with, my hat no longer has
a brim,
So when I go home, there is not much for me to expect save
whippings.

"As to supper, alas ! I often have to go to bed without it,
As a punishment for all my sins,
Yet I am never sorry ; I grow worse and worse ;
Old Blunderer is the name with which I honour my father.

"My little mother is tender, and tries to make excuses for me,
But instead of being grateful to her, and saving her trouble,
I call her RED FACE ! that is all the thanks I give her.
I think there is no need to add that I am a regular Good for
Nothing."

He grew out of these rude ways and naughty tricks as he became older, but he never got rid of the undisciplined nature that was born with him. His widow, who did not exactly praise all his ways, remembered him as a very sweet-tempered man, unfailingly amiable under ordinary circumstances, but quite incapable of governing himself, and impatient of all control. He never did anything by halves. Sometimes he began to weep bitterly without anybody knowing why. He loved to be mysterious, never telling his thoughts, and disliking to be questioned. But perhaps the most striking thing about him was his love of wandering. To the

day of his death he had the restless, adventurous spirit of a young colt, and as soon as anybody put the least restraint upon him, he reared. We have seen how he behaved to the farmer who scolded him for dreaming, instead of looking after the beasts. The herd came home in the evening without their keeper, and Yann was seen no more in Saint Drien for ten long years.

The village had altered greatly in appearance during that time; the greater number of the cottages had become houses, had exchanged their clay walls for stone, their thatched roofs for slate. Only one had remained the same, and it was to its window Yann hurried, never doubting that Marie-Françoise, his little friend of former days, would be there waiting for him. He found her, not such as he had left her, but such as he loved to find her, and they married before God and the Government. The day after the wedding, the wife said to her husband—

“Yann, my love, we must begin to think about the future. There is just one little cloud upon our happiness, it seems to me: you have no occupation, you know. Now, I am a very good spinner, how nice it would be if you would become a flax-beater!” . . .

So Yann took to beating flax, and for a whole year worked most conscientiously. Sometimes, sudden fits of sadness clouded his brow, but they soon melted away. While working he composed, and when Sunday arrived, as they came from Mass, he would settle himself down in the inn parlour, with two or three friends, and read them his new couplets. Very sober he was, never drinking anything stronger than coffee; very religious, too, a regular attendant at all the services.

At the end of a year, Marie-Françoise le Moullec presented him with a little daughter, whom he named after the blessed Virgin, and began adoring to such a degree that it almost seemed as though his mind were affected. From that time he became less industrious, passing long hours in ecstasy, beside the child's cradle. His wife tried to argue with him, but it was no use; he let her talk, and went on as before.

"Yann," said she, one day, "you are too fond of the little one; children who are loved too much, live too little."

She hoped, by reminding him of this old saying, to recall him to a calmer and more reasonable frame of mind, but it had a contrary effect. From that moment, Yann never left his little girl. Even his nights were passed listening to her breathing as she slept, and all day long, when the weather was fine, he carried her in his arms, strained close to his bosom in a wild embrace, and, till the first dews of night, bore her over field and moorland, singing her all manner of lovely things that he never wrote about. He hoped that by so doing he should drive away the bad luck with which his wife had threatened him, but he failed. When she was six years old the child died. The father's despair was as infinite as his love. They had to take the little body by force from his arms, and when the funeral was over, the mother was left to go back to the house alone.

"I can never come home again," said Yann, "till my dead girl returns to me."

He felt quite sure that she really would come to life again; the Virgin, her godmother, would perform this



CHILDREN OF VANNES

miracle on her behalf. So he started travelling about the country, while waiting for that happy day, well pleased at heart to take up his wandering life once more. It was such a relief to be without the weight of sedentary work, to stretch his sparrow's wings again in the free, open air.

As he wandered about the roads, his sorrow fled away. Poetry soon succeeded in comforting him, and his reputation as a rhymster spread far. People came to ask for verses, and he undertook all with equal readiness, no matter what the subject: melancholy poems for unfortunate lovers, satires against miserly masters or faithless maidens. But what he really preferred was to sing the praises of the great Breton saints, or celebrate the various local festivals, enumerating at the same time the wonderful virtues of the sacred fountains. No Pardon was complete without Yann. The blind Bard of Kersuliet, Yann Ar Guenn,* who had given up his calling, heard with joy that his successor had appeared, and expressed a wish to meet him. No time did Yann Ar Minouz lose in answering to the call of him he always spoke of as "My godfather." The interview took place in the old man's cottage by the water's edge, at the foot of the Yellow Rock at Tréguier. There for some years the blind Bard had lived the life of a hermit, tied to his oak chair by the infirmities of old age, with no other amusement than to listen to the plick-plock of the oars, as the heavy barges of seaweed or sand went up with the tide; waiting, to use his words, "for the silent coming of the Boat of Souls," in which, before very long, he

* An account of this popular poet will be found in the introduction to "Soniou Breiz-Izel," p. xxiv.

would travel to the other world. It was touching, that interview—even solemn; after long years, Yann Ar Minouz could never speak of it without emotion.

“When I pushed open the door,” he would say, “I found myself in a narrow room, as dark as the devil. In the chimney at the far end, a turf fire was burning silently, and out of the darkness came the broken voice of an old woman, asking me, sharply, what I wanted. I answered that I was Yann Ar Minouz, and that I had come to pay my respects to the Father of Songs, the illustrious Dall Ar Guenn.* Then, all in a moment, the old wife changed her tone, and spoke to me quite sweetly.

“‘God bless you, friend Yann,’ said she; ‘my husband has been longing to meet you. I am Marie Petitbon. You shall taste my crêpes presently; they are as good, in their way, as Dall Ar Guenn’s verses. . . . Come to the fire, and let my poor old man embrace you, as he cannot see you.’

“Ah! she was a good talker, I promise you, and one who didn’t keep her tongue in her apron pocket. But while she entertained me with her pretty speeches, I did nothing but feast my eyes on her husband, whose great bony form I began to make out, seated as though folded up, at one corner of the hearth. When he turned on me his majestic face, framed by hair white as the hoar-frost, I noticed the motionless eyelids, that gave him an almost superhuman dignity. I felt as though I

* In Brittany it is usual to mention the afflicted thus by their affliction—Dall Ar Guenn, Blind Le Guenn, Tort Ar Bonniec, Lame Le Bonniec. It is not considered in the least disrespectful.

were looking at the Eternal Father Himself, and was just about to fall on my knees, when he stretched out his wrinkled hand toward me.

“‘Sing!’ said he; and I sang for two hours. If I showed any sign of stopping, he exclaimed, ‘Dalc’h-ta, mab; dalc’h-ta’ [‘Go on, my son; go on!’], and I could see by his face that he was really pleased. As soon as I had finished, I heard him murmur, ‘Come, come, now I can die in peace;’ and drawing me towards him, he blessed me. I can tell you I felt as delighted as some missionary, who has just been consecrated by his bishop.”

There is no doubt that this consecration accounted for a good many of the lofty illusions as to the quality of his poetry, with which Yann consoled himself as long as he lived. He had a very high ideal of his art, and was fairly satisfied with the way in which he expressed it. The workmen at Le Goffic’s old printing-house at Lannion still remember the condescending and superior air with which this ragged Bard would place on the counter his extraordinary manuscripts. I have a few specimens of them in my possession. The paper has been picked up God knows where; it looks as if it had come out of some dust-heap. Margins of daily papers, backs of prospectuses, leaves torn from account-books, copy-books blotted with ink, stained by the dust of the highway, all tied together with a bit of thread. And over it all Yann’s coarse writing trails in a determined, fantastic fashion, like the broad, winding trenches cut by a plough in the bosom of the autumn waste-land. The strokes for the most part are heavy, careless and laboured is the language; but here and there a verse

stands out, a fine, sonorous verse, which bears on its wings the whole of the poem. Thus will a bird's song oftentimes suffice to cheer the monotony of a whole dull landscape.

The poet usually had ten or twenty thousand copies of his works printed at a time. For convenience sake he divided these among the four or five districts through which he was accustomed to travel, giving them into the charge of a few trusty friends, who undertook to keep him supplied, according to the requirements of his sale, and thus his calfskin knapsack was no sooner empty than it was refilled. It was in the early days of March that Yann began his travels, for then in Breton land comes the time of "Fairs and Pardons." Then, over both slopes of the Mountains of Aré, the roads are crowded by pilgrims, cattle, and carts. Then the silver crowns come forth, from beneath piles of linen, that lie in the depths of great cupboards; and the boys get out their new waistcoats, and girls their brodered caps. Then the face of our old peninsula, still wet with winter rain, lights up with a gentle smile, for nothing in the world is so sweet and delicate as a western springtide. There is a charm about it, a softness, something that I can only describe as maiden modesty, that is altogether its own. Pale, golden light floods the heaven, and the air is sharp as a sea-breeze. The distance is blue, thin blue, almost transparent, and on the hilltops the church spires rise bolder than ever, as they send the tinkling message of their chimes from one parish to another. One has to know the Breton people quite intimately before one can realize what a powerful effect these shrill sounds have upon them, what echoes

they awake in their hearts. There is a legend that says, that if there could be found a diver bold enough to set the long-silent bell of Ker-Is a-swinging, the whole town, "The Beauty of Sleeping Waters," would arise again in its splendour above the ocean that engulfed it. And as a matter of fact, that is what happens every year among our countrymen as soon as the first Pardon chimes are heard in the land. A whole unexpected world of sentiment, young, graceful, and poetic, suddenly arises from the grey depths of the Breton nature, called to life by the music of the bells. These silent, reserved people become gay as light-hearted children. They desert the cottages in which they have been shut up all winter, never even taking the precaution of bolting the doors. They wander off toward the neighbouring towns, gather round their chapels and worshipping places, often little more than a simple fountain, scarce visible beneath the willows growing in the midst of some meadow. They have but the most hazy notions of time, or even of money; only a craving for pleasure seizes them, modest pleasure, almost always innocent, very rarely coarse. Their chief amusements are wrestling and dancing, but what they love above all is singing, and those who really devote themselves to song are looked upon as inspired.

Yann never appeared but a crowd gathered around him, and as long as he chose to give them anything to listen to, they hung upon his lips. They would seize the leaflets, where the song appeared in coarse, blotted print, the young girls slipping them carefully into the folds of their shawls, or their apron pockets; the boys stuffing out their jackets with them or pinning them

to their hats. There is not a farm in Trégor, where, yellowing in the sun, by the side of the Lives of the Saints, on the window-ledge, you will not find a heap of works by Yann Ar Minouz. The coppers used literally to come pouring down at the feet of the Bard, and he might well have amassed quite a modest competence, giving the lie to the Breton adage that speaks of poetry as "a starving trade," but he was too entirely a child of his race and country to have a sense of economy. He was perfectly content to live from day to day, spending without ever counting the cost, in true artistic style ; paying, during rich weeks, for the luxury of keeping a court of beggars, who gorged themselves at his expense, and praised his generosity.

Never once did it occur to him to send his wife any of the money he made. He seemed to have forgotten her very existence, and, for her part, she was too proud to ask him for any help. He had left her with four children on her hands, four boys, born during those years that preceded Mary's death. To provide for them, Marie-Françoise went out to service, and while she toiled for others a good-natured neighbour kept her house and looked after her family.

"One evening, as I came home from work," said she, "I saw a man stooping to peep through the window into the cottage, and I knew it was Yann. As soon as he had taken a good look, off he went again ; no doubt he had come to see if Mary had returned. At long intervals he used to appear in the neighbourhood like that, and one day we happened to meet.

" 'Good day, Marie-Françoise,' said he, affectionately, and I answered, 'Good day, Yann' ; that was all. He

never asked me a word about our boys, the eldest of whom was by that time a mason at Lézardrieux."

However, when this eldest son was married, the husband and wife at last met, for Yann came in person to bring his consent. He showed not the slightest repentance or embarrassment, seemed gay and happy, sang some capital songs, and when night came, lay quietly down beside his wife in the bed where they had slept during their short married life. Next day he took his flight; but within the week they saw him again, and little by little he settled down. He had become rheumatic through sleeping at "La Belle Étoile," his voice, too, was getting hoarse, and his lungs were failing. The quiet warmth of the fireside was gradually weaning him from his nomadic life, and he ended by placing his walking-staff in the chimney-corner, murmuring the lines of Proux: "Hac ar c'henvid da steu'n ouz va fenn-baz déro." *

After that he never left Pleumeur, save twice a year, when, however much any one might dissuade him, he insisted on making two pilgrimages, to which he remained faithful till the day of his death. The first was to Ménez-Bré, where stands the chapel of Saint Hervé, patron of bards; the other to Rumengol, traditional meeting-place of singers.

* The spiders now may spin their webs around my oak penn-baz.

CHAPTER VI

HE was sitting opposite me near the open window, through which delicious little breezes reached us from the fresh night without.

"Why is this Pardon called the Pardon of Singers? Perhaps, Yann, you, who know everything, can tell me? There must be some other reason than that the conscript gave me."

"Why, yes! of course there is. I will tell you all about it as you don't know; only mind, it is true history."

"When King Gralon, having finished his purgatory on earth, crossed the doorstep into paradise, the first person whom he met was the Virgin Mary, who began thanking him very heartily for the beautiful church he had built for her. 'If there is anything you can think of to make you perfectly happy here,' she added, 'I shall be very pleased indeed to give it to you.'

"'Alas!' answered the old king, 'how can I be happy while my daughter Ahès carries on her sad business as a murderess? The remembrance never leaves me for a moment.'

"The Virgin drooped her head. 'Ah,' said she, 'I am afraid I can do nothing about that.'

"'But you can at least prevent her drowning people. By taking away her sweet voice, the means of all her crimes, you can remove my people's curse from her.'

“ ‘No, Gralon ; what is, must ever be. But listen, I will tell you what I can and will do. A race of singers shall arise, who shall sing as sweetly as the siren, and by means of their voices they shall overcome her evil charm. I will endow them with the double gift of beautiful verse and pious thought. Wherever Ahès goes spreading mourning and terror, there shall these singers pass, bringing hope and comfort. They shall soothe the sorrows she causes, give peace to the souls she fills with consternation ; and just as I am the Virgin of All-Heal, they shall be the comforters of all sorrow. Every year in the month of May, which is my own month, you shall see them hastening to my Pardon of Rumengol. There, from an inexhaustible source, a fount of songs and canticles shall flow, and from thence they shall spread far and wide, to make known to all the world the strength of the Breton men, the beauty of their daughters, the prowess of their ancestors ; and your story too, O, Gralon ! shall they sing. Fields and moors, threshing-floors and village greens, shall resound to their unwearying voices, till as soon as any one catches sight of them he shall cry, ‘ See, here come the Virgin’s nightingales ! ’

“ So spoke Our Lady, and a great joy arose in the old king’s heart as he listened. And now you know what you wanted to know.”

I mentioned to Yann the name of the Breton poet, Le Scour, who called himself The Bard of Rumengol.

“ Yes,” said he, “ he has earned that title more than any one else. He has written a whole book about this worshipping place. I used to know Ar Scour ; he was a poet and a winemaker at the same time. He was a rich

Bard, which is a rare kind of bird, but he never looked down on his poorer brethren, those like myself, who having no wine to sell, are obliged to live by their verses. He was always kind and generous, willing to open his door and purse to them. His house at Morlaix was free to any professional poet. Some of the songs he wrote will be sung as long as the Breton tongue is spoken. Who does not know by heart, Gwennili tréméniaed [the swallow]? I know that disagreeable people have said that his best pieces were not really his own, that others put their talents into them, and he had only to sign them. But all that is very much exaggerated. Still I must confess that Plac'hik Eùssa [the little girl of Ouessant], the most finished poem in his Têlen Rumengol [Harp of Rumengol], is a very ancient gwerz, which he appropriated, and simply renovated. I used to hear my father sing it when I was a little child. He would hum it as he pushed the shuttle backwards and forwards ; it had such a sad slow tune that it made us all cry. I have kept to his way of singing it, and if you are about when the processions from Ouessant pass by the churchyard wall, you may see for yourself how I can draw tears from that fierce race of pirates."

We went out together, but parted on the doorstep. As I had disturbed him from his nap, Yann thought he might as well make use of the extra time by beginning his rounds in the refreshment booths and tents. He knew that there he would be sure to sell the remaining copies of his famous "Dispute between Brandy and Coffee." As for me, I went off to the left.

Here rose the great sombre arch at the entrance to

the churchyard, and just within it stood an immense yew tree, old as time itself, the Death Tree, a kind of funereal baobab, that had fattened on the human remains of many a century—a distorted trunk, tortured, twisted into a spiral, roots burrowing through the wall, branches reaching out only in one direction, very low, almost on a level with the tombs, covering the poor enclosure with shadow, pouring down its dense, heavy melancholy in a black, unrippled pool. A path, bounded by crosses, led to the church porch. Within, thick darkness reigned, and I heard the rhythmical breathing of a sleeping multitude. By the thin light that entered now and again, as some one opened the door of the nave, the bodies of men and women could be seen lying pell-mell on the stone bench that ran along the wall. One beggar, stretched out with his head on his knapsack, his staff between his legs, and a little spaniel at his feet, looked for all the world like the sculptured, granite figure of a bishop, lying under the arch of a tomb, his hands joined over his cross, and sandals resting on some heraldic beast.

Within the church, at ten o'clock !

A little too gilded, this interior, a little too much loaded by distracting ornament. It is vaguely lighted by candles from behind the pillar, against which the Madonna of the place is leaning. And this light, coming from some invisible source, this diffused radiance, is most mysterious, soft, and sweet. It caresses the white coifs of the women—fine net caps from Douarnenez, flat-backed caps from Carhaix, caps from Concarneau like fresh crimped skate, caps from Châteaulin with fluttering wings, caps from Léon swelling as the sails in a bay,

thin and delicate. In the apse, prostrate before the altar steps, a circle of women are murmuring the Prayers of the Rosary, and the whole Church makes answer in a low plaintive whisper. There is a confused poetry about this endless litany, that fades, every now and then, and almost dies away, then suddenly comes to life again, but is always wavering, always uncertain, like the rustling of leaves stirred by the shifting breeze—a dream-prayer rising from hundreds of drowsy lips. The vigil lasts till daybreak. All these weary people have vowed to pass the night in the church ; nothing in the world would make them quit their posts, not even the offer of the very finest of beds. The tired, careless postures, the weary faces, make the spectacle still more strange, reminding one of the bands of suppliants in some old tragedy. The comparison is in no way exaggerated ; I have seen the most wonderful faces at Rumengol, perfect types of stern, sorrowful beauty. Look at this young girl, for instance, whose head has fallen on to the shoulder of her brother, or sweetheart. She is sleeping as though in a trance, yet even in her perfect unconsciousness she preserves a certain graceful beauty, impossible to describe. And then this peasant woman, seated on her heels, her sad face, old before its time, wrinkled with care, furrowed by tears. With one hand she is telling her beads, with the other she supports her son, a tall, pale boy, who lies across her knees, devoured by some incurable illness. She broods over him with her loving eyes, and her persistent prayers lull him like an endless cradle-song. Truly is she a Mother of Seven Sorrows, a pathetic, living image of La Pietà.

Outside, a song arises, a slow minor ode, one of



VIGIL OF SONG IN THE CHURCHYARD

those penetrating Breton songs in which the same phrase keeps repeating again and again, now dull as a sigh, now sharp and strident as the howl of a wounded dog. It is the beginning of another vigil, the Vigil of Song in the churchyard. Pilgrims have planted themselves among the grass of the graves, on the tops of the tombs. Perched on one of the highest, her back against a cross, a girl is singing, a girl from Spézet, tall and thin, her black bodice braided with velvet, her head small, her eyes too large. A friend, crouching at her feet, whispers the first words of each verse to her, spelling them slowly out from an old hymn-book with the aid of a wavering candle. The voice of the singer has weird notes in it, low notes, veiled as though they came from a long distance, and which remain long quivering in the air. Then, abruptly, without any noticeable transition, the song flings itself forth angrily with a loud, hoarse cry, so that the girl is quite out of breath by the time that she gets to the end of each verse. Others join in the refrain, the "Diskan," with a broad lingering of rhythm, infinitely sorrowful, and the singer goes on immediately, with never a pause or interval. Her head is thrown back, and the veins of her neck stand out like cords, while down her flushed cheeks great drops are running. Her bodice has come unfastened with the swell of her bosom, the string of her cap is broken, but what cares she! Exhausted, breathless, she goes stubbornly on. Others offer to take her place, but in vain, she will not yield it; at the very thought she redoubles her passion, her ecstasy. Truly it is the delirium of sacred fury. She seems a priestess of an earlier religion, possessed by the ancient gods,

the subtle essence of whose spirits naturally linger round such places as Rumengol.

. . . I am going by the footpaths along the little river to Le Faou. It is almost three o'clock, and a rosy flush is softly growing in the eastern sky. It seems as though it were true, the adage that declares, that, while the Pardon lasts, night at Rumengol is even as day. The sea-breeze has risen, and among the green of the trees something is shining, an ocean sword plunging into the heart of the land. And here is Le Faou—old walls, old roofs, a complete tiny city, with the air of bygone days, dominated by the court-house, great souvenir of feudal times. A quay, the rigging of a ship sharply outlined on the pearl-grey distant waters, the silhouette of a solitary exciseman, perched at the end of the breakwater like a cormorant at rest. As the western mists scatter, three promontories come into view, solitary rocks, haunted by great names and greater miracles—Kerohan, Le Priolly, Landévennec. A cloudy shape, at first uncertain, but little by little growing sharper and more solid, raises itself at last, and is Ménez Hom, chief of the clan of the Monts-Noirs, their sentinel towards the Atlantic. With his swelling ridge and his face raised to the sun, he hangs over the sea as though warning the sailor from perpetual danger.

And now, under the first faint eastern light, the sea shivers, the sea awakes. Purple shadows spread over its surface, like the blushes that stain the white bosom of a maiden when her heart first beats at the coming of her lover. I know of nothing to compare in beauty with this awakening of the sea in the early dusk of a summer morning. It is like watching the first dawn,

the coming of light to the new-made world, when the waters were separated from the earth, the light from the shadows. In these great quiet tracts of the far west, where man has not yet forced his invading, deforming personality on all around him, but still remains brother to nature, daybreak has kept its poetry, the charm of its young grace, and mystic majesty.

. . . Round the Isle of Tibidi, the Rock of Prayer,* I can see a sail approaching, and behind it another and another, piercing the level grey with specks of brown. It is the procession of boats from Ouessant, making their way up the tidal river. Heavy strong fishing craft they are, built to weather the daily storms from the west, but now decked out for the occasion like sacred boats of old. Can it be that the soft, rippling waters of this sheltered inland sea frighten them, tempest dwellers as they are, wrestlers with untamed hurricanes? or do they realize the solemn nature of their expedition, that they move so slowly along, with the grave, noble bearing of Greek warships sailing across the smiling sea towards white Delos? As they reach the narrow channel they fall into single file, lower their canvas, and draw quietly up to the quay to disembark their passengers, all in perfect silence, almost without a movement. The women are the first to land, each, faithful to the ancient custom, falling on her knees to kiss the ground, where, according to tradition, begins the holy land, the kingdom of Our Lady. Then in groups they start towards the House of the Saint, all feet bare, each hand holding a candle. Tall they are for the most part, a little masculine, with

* So-called because of the frequent "retreats" Gwennolé and his monks spent there.

features regular, but too strong and determined. Their skin is not only tanned, but reddened to the bright red of salted flesh, that of the old as of the young. Only their eyes are beautiful—their warm, blue-green eyes, calling to mind rock pools of clear sea-water sleeping on beds of seaweed. Moreover, they are sad eyes, reflecting in their limpid depths shadows of past griefs and foretaste of sorrows to come. There is not one among these Ouessantines who from birth to death has not been destined to eternal weeping. They live in perpetual terror of that sea which robs them of their fathers, their lovers, their husbands, their sons. This is why they dress in mourning from the cradle to the grave. Black is the bodice, black the skirt and apron, black the covering worn over the stiff white cap. There is something priestly about this large angular head-dress, its falling flaps calling to mind the "Pschent" of ancient Egypt. No finery, no coquetry; even the hair, that pride of womanhood, crown of her sovereignty, hangs down the neck and cheeks in short straight locks. Everything—the sombre dress, the loose hair around the mournful faces, still more the melancholy lament that rises from their lips by way of prayer—all tends to sadden one's heart by calling up thoughts of death and desolation, till at length these women seem a troop of victims driven forward to their doom by some goddess of fate.

They follow the road absorbed in their devotions, distracted neither by the warmth of the air, the scented flowers, nor that young verdure to which their eyes must be so little accustomed. Many of them are to-day for the first time breathing this sweet country fragrance,

yet all these matters are but of little moment to them, well used as they are to their savage island, naked beneath its thin mantle of scorched grass. They pass by the enchantments of the mainland with perfect indifference, having eyes only for the thin granite needle that rises high on the crest from behind a curtain of forest. Right over its point still lingers a belated star, feebly twinkling in a sky half covered by the rising waves of day. To the Ouessantines this pale little light must seem a heavenly beacon, for no sooner do they catch sight of it than they break together into the hymn of the Virgin, the Breton version of the "Ave maris stella"—

"Ni ho salud, stéréden vor ! . . ."

The voices are cast back by the great echo of the mountains, and the men, who have dropped a little behind, hasten their steps at the sound. I have fallen in among them, some fifty great lads, in grey or blue woollen jerseys, with huge muscles, giant fists, and the good, placid faces of sweet-tempered children. Long dark lashes shade their light eyes, uncertain in colour, as though washed by sea-mists. They are very friendly and talkative, telling me that they started from Ouessant last evening ; that it took them nearly ten hours to cross the Iroise, and that they have brought food enough for three days. "Because, you see, in our part of the world it is easy enough to know when you start, but no one can possibly say when you may get home again." From time to time some innkeeper, sitting on a cask by the roadside, near his bottle-covered counter, calls to them—

"Well, and are not you Island folk going to take a morning drink?"

To which they answer cheerfully, "We'll take two as we go back;" for they have been fasting since midnight, so as to be ready to take the sacrament at early Mass.

Each of these men is performing the pilgrimage for his whole family, and has to bear back to his people the blessing of Our Lady. There is not a household in the island but has a representative here, a delegate entrusted with the most important missions. Sometimes lots are drawn for this office, and during the week preceding his departure, the pilgrim visits all his relations, from the great uncle to the very last little cousin. Each gives him some commission for the saint. Perhaps it is the grandfather, who feels his sight failing, and asks that it may be preserved to him; or it is Aunt Barba, who has gout, and wants to be cured; then there is "tonton" Guillou, distracted by a lawsuit, who expects the Virgin to appear on his behalf before the judges; and Gardik Tassel, called "Too White," because of her extreme pallor. Though only just twenty, she is fading away from some complaint of which neither she nor any one else can tell the cause; but no doubt the Virgin of All-Heal will recognize its nature. And many more messages there are; prescriptions, too, some of them most complicated. "You see this halfpenny? You must put that one in the church box, and this you must drop into the fountain. Now, be careful not to mix them!" Or, "You must light a candle on the right-hand side of the Virgin, and notice how many times the flame leaps up before beginning to burn steadily." In short, there

is a complete system of rites, in which our civilized memories would most certainly lose themselves. The Islander, however, finds no more difficulty than among the tangled rigging of his boat. He arranges it all, and gets it ready in his mind with that habit of neatness peculiar to sailors. You may be sure that he will not forget the very least detail, and will perform one after another each of the commissions with which he has been entrusted. Should he fail in any respect, he would consider himself guilty of sacrilege; for is not the welfare of all those who are dearest to him involved in these practices? Even he himself has the greatest faith in their efficacy. Only one example is known of an Islander having failed. The unhappy man was given to drinking, possessed by the demon of brandy, and happening on his arrival to turn in at one of the taverns of Le Faou, forgot his mission, and never set foot in Rumengol at all. When the pilgrims whom he had brought over with him returned from the Pardon, they found him sobered and repentant, but nevertheless they refused to return in his boat; and they did wisely, for no one ever heard tell of him again—even the sea never gave up his body. And the Ouessantine who furnished me with these particulars added in a serious tone—

“It was very fortunate that he did not bring down God’s judgment on his whole race.”

“What is the object of these women in coming with you? Why do they not send a father, husband, son, or even some cousin?”

“Oh,” said he, calmly, “probably because they have none. There are so many homes in the Island without

any men at all. Every year numbers of us go to sleep in the great graveyard, where every one is his own sexton ;" and he pointed with a gesture to the ocean lying below, the soft rosy sea, spread voluptuously out over a race of dead men.

CHAPTER VII

THE clock is striking with short, hurried strokes. It is the sign for a general movement. From barns, stables, and lofts, comes a tumbled crowd, their faces still flushed with sleep, bits of straw sticking in their hair, dust on their backs. They smear their cheeks with a little water at the trough in the corner of the yard, the women rearranging their caps and dusting their skirts and aprons. Endless lines are moving toward the church; people seem coming from everywhere, rising up from the meadows, climbing down from the trees, stout dwarf oaks, sculptured by time into great armchairs. The whole country round about Rumengol has the look of a tumbled bed, a great couch, where thousands of people have been sleeping, and from the trampled grass and deep hay, pressed into the shape of bodies, rises a fresh, sweet scent that fills all space.

Here and there are still smoking heaps of ashes, forsaken bivouac fires.

During the warm nights of June the Breton peasant does not take in his cattle, but leaves them free to feed, or meditate under the stars, instead of shutting them up in the stable, and the upland valley of Rumengol, with its fresh water and rich pasture, is a celebrated breeding-place. So in the clear morning light, all the country around is speckled with dots of white, and tan, and

black. There are hundreds and hundreds of these cattle scattered over the slopes. They move along with the easy indolence of well-to-do beasts, a little astonished perhaps at the enormous wealth of people in their usually quiet neighbourhood. Some of them lean against the gates of the stone barriers, or stand with their dewy noses hanging over the broom hedges, mooing gently, and rolling their great soft eyes. More than one pilgrim stretches out an arm to caress them in passing, for they are a well-recognized feature of the *fête*. Is it not written in the Book of the Virgin, that—“She brought forth her Son, the Mabik, in the midst of the oxen?” and does not our Lady of Rumengol care for the beasts as well as for the men? One year some gipsies, the rascals, stole a cow during the night. They led her away into the forest of Kranou, and were just about to kill her and eat her, when suddenly a storm broke forth, a storm that had certainly not been foretold by any signs in the weather. Three claps of thunder resounded, and the lightning struck the thieves, along with the tree to which the cow was tied. She, herself, was not in the least damaged, and her cord being now loosed, was able to rejoin the herd without their even having had time to miss her. In the end she benefited greatly by this adventure. No one doubted that she had been saved by a miracle, and she was looked upon as a special favourite of the Virgin, and treated with all the consideration due to her estate. From that time forth she always had the softest litter, the best-filled rack, and after having lived long in plenty, died at last of old age, without having ever known the anxiety of being taken to distant fairs. . . .

If you wish to get some idea of the surprising variety of our Breton race, its diversity of type, its richness of costume, stand in the churchyard of Rumengol and watch the people come from early Mass on Trinity Sunday. All Brittany has assembled there as a single man. What effects, what contrasts! Here are the big people of Léon, keen business men, sombre fanatics, born to be either merchants or priests, never opening their disdainful lips save to utter a prayer or talk about money. Near them are the men of Tréguier, quick-eyed and active, with open, honest faces. Pleasant talkers they are, with a touch of sarcasm in their smile. . . . Over there again, stand the Tran' Doué, the folk of Pont-Labbé, dressed like Mexicans, with yellow-broidered waistcoats, and broad trousers that swell out above the ankles. Handsome men for the most part, with large, red beards framing their jolly faces. They leave all the disfiguring duties of life to their wives, while they parade their proud manhood about at all the Fairs and Pardons. . . . And here comes the light blue, the azure of the men of Cornouailles, worked with festoons of gold the colour of the broom. A little clumsy and overdressed are these clean-shaved Southern Bretons, but happy with an innocent, everyday cheerfulness that is shown by their rosy, boyish faces, their taste for colours, and all things gaudy; above all, by the bright jollity of their songs. But how they serve to set off to advantage the graceful sons of the Mountains of Aré, supple and straight as pine trees! In their brown woollen costume, like that of the shepherds of old time, they make one think of the haughty freebooters of the Aber, or those Palikares of the Greek coast, who, like

them, wore caps of fustanette, and were great, splendid lads, with arms like huge wings, and the sharp profiles of birds cleaving the air.

Above, on an eminence, a grassy dune, that grows out of the churchyard, bearing on its top a chapel, Yann Ar Minouz has begun the Lament of Plac'hik Eûssa, in his harsh, strident voice—

“In Eûssa lived a little maid,
Pretty and good as an angel,
Pretty and good as an angel,
And her name was Corentine.

“Alas ! she was but fifteen years of age,
And already a heavy cross she bore.
Upon a rock close to the sea
The little maiden was weeping bitter tears.

“And from her full heart thus she prayed,
Crying aloud toward the heavens. . . .”

A slanting ray of sunshine began to play over the ragged locks of the Bard. The men and women from the Island came crowding around him in a circle, drinking in his words, and noting every expression on his face as they followed the course of the song. For not content with singing, he acted, and that so well, that he turned the lament into a dramatic monologue. Ah, what an actor he was ! Joining his hands, he raised his eyes full of tears to heaven, and his voice, faltering at first, grew into the most heartbreaking of cries. . . .

“In the deep sea was my father drowned,
Fighting against the English.
When they told her this grievous news
The heart of my dear mother broke.



IN EÚZA LIVED A LITTLE MAID, PRETTY AND GOOD AS AN ANGEL

"So now I have no one, alas !
And what shall I do here all'alone?
No longer have I on this earth,
Father, or mother, or any dear friend !

"Father or mother, no, nor any friend ;
Life is for me but grief and sorrow."

One of the Ouessantines has hidden her face in her handkerchief, and it is plain that she is endeavouring to stifle her sobs. The sailor with whom I talked on the way up, whispers in my ear—

"She is an orphan, poor girl ; it is exactly as if the words were written for her, and the Song Man singing them for the first time."

And now in a sweeter key, gently swaying his whole body, Yann continues—

"But ah! there is a Father in heaven,
And a good Mother at Rumengol !

"My mother often said to me,
'Pray to the Blessed Virgin, child--
The tender Virgin of Rumengol,
For she will never forsake you.'

"Stretch forth your holy hand, oh, Virgin,
Over your desolate, sorrowing child,
Over me, the forsaken orphan,
And I will go with bare feet to your Pardon.

"Barefoot will I go to ask for help
At your House of All-heal,
Seven times will I make the tour
Of the High Altar on my knees.

"Seven times the tour of your sanctuary,
Oh, Virgin, protector of all Bretons.
Lady Mary, our poor people
Cannot make you costly presents ;

“Neither waxen girdles nor candles,
Nothing, unless it be their prayers, oh, Virgin !
Poor as they, my only treasure
Is my hair, my golden hair.

“I will bind a garland for you
Made all of my fair hair ;
Mingled with wild flowers, simple flowers,
Glittering with the rosary of my tears. . . .”

The sad rosary of tears glitters in the eyes of many of the women standing around ; it traces deep, damp furrows in their weather-beaten cheeks, and drops slowly into the folds of their crossed shawls. Even the men themselves are moved, and keep wiping their eyes with the backs of their great, coarse, tar-stained hands. And minute by minute the number of listeners increases ; all the Pardon is flowing towards the singer, whose sun-crowned head rises above the crowd. His shirt is unfastened, and I can see his naked breast, hairy, like the skin of a wild beast. Then the song goes on—

“Corentine has set out on her journey,
Her white staff in her hand ;
She crosses the sea and follows the road
That leads to heaven and to the saints.

“And now, see, she has drawn so close
That she can hear the sweet bells ringing ;
And as she catches sight of the spire
She kneels, and breathes a prayer to Heaven.

“As soon as she sets foot in Rumengol
She hastens to kiss the Virgin’s feet,
And says, ‘Dear Blessed Mother of God,
Oh let me die beside you here.

“ No longer have I any one to love me,
 Oh, be merciful, take me and carry me away ;
 My body shall rest in the churchyard here,
 And my soul shall go away to live with you.’ ”

Here Yann pauses, mops his forehead with his handkerchief, stretches his hands to the multitude, and in a deep voice broken by emotion, says—

“ Cross yourselves, Christians, the Virgin is going to speak.”

“ Then, as the maid knelt before her, weeping,
 Said the Virgin in her sweet voice,
 ‘ On earth there are only wicked men,
 God save thee, oh, my little one.

“ ‘ Thy sweet soul and thy poor heart
 Are now as pure as gold,
 Then come Corentine, into the depths of heaven,
 And praise my Son Jesus, the good Master.’ ”

“ And there as Corentine died,
 She cried with a loud voice,
 ‘ I give my heart to the Blessed Virgin,
 And my curse to the English ! ’ ”

This final verse, the war-cry of the race, the Bard flings out of his full lungs with a note so sharp and vibrating that the crowd trembles and shudders, as the great primitive hatred of twelve hundred years ago courses once more through its veins. . . .

The sun has risen high above the horizon now. From Le Faou, Landerneau, Châteaulin, brakes and omnibuses are beginning to arrive, their springs groaning beneath the weight of shopkeepers and their families, who have come to Rumengol, as they would to any fair, to make fun of the peasants, and eat cold veal on the grass

where the pilgrims have been sleeping. The true Pardon is over. Let us haste away if we wish to keep unspoiled the remembrances of the night and of the early morning.

I take one more drink with the old poet of Trégor in the inn where we met last night, and there we say farewell to one another.

"I have a feeling," says Yann, sadly, "that I shall never again sing the song of Plac'hik Eùssa to the Islanders. But that is not what troubles me most; it is the thought that the time is drawing near when there will be an end of all these beautiful gwerz that our fathers have loved, the sweet Sônes which, even from old lips like mine, sound gay as the song of birds in springtime. All these things are dying, and many others that have gladdened our hearts. The Pardons, alas! even the Pardons themselves will disappear, though I believe no one but myself has realized it. Everywhere the roads by which I travel are bordered by ruined chapels. The ghost of a bell still chimes from the broken steeple; I often hear its sad, mysterious knell as I pass by in the evening. But, putting myself aside, who is there that lends an ear to the warning? Our priests? Why, they are the very first to kill our saints, to let their worship fall into disuse. It is they who make bare our most holy sanctuaries by leading the people away in troops to foreign shrines, to far-away virgins, to Lourdes, to Salette, to Paray-le-Monial! What right have they to lead Breton devotion away from its own land! Let them beware lest so much travelling does away with it altogether! My mother used to cry out against these new ways. "There is

only one road to paradise," she would say, "and you will find it by following in the footsteps of the saints of your own country." I tremble for the days to come. Thank God I shall not live to see them ; before then they will have covered my face with the cloth, beneath which a man sleeps for ever. . . .

And now I am making my way back towards Quimerc'h by the footpath through the bracken. Half-way across I overtake two good old women of Cornouailles, who in merry mood, with much shrugging of shoulders, are telling endless stories to each other, both speaking together, neither listening to what the other says. Their double soliloquy follows me for some time, fading at last into the deep peace of vast, unbroken silence, the entrancing calm of a wilderness. To the north the woods of Kranou billow away into the distance, towards the west the ocean flames like a bowl of molten gold. Rumengol, its Pardon, its beggars, its singers, all seem to have glided down into the shadow of the ravine ; now the gilded saddle of Hanvec country sinks in its turn, while far, far off in the depths of the sky appear the blue crests of the Aré Mountains. Not a belfry to be seen, not a roof, nor even one of those smoke-dried cabins that sometimes betray the presence of man. Once more there comes that feeling of being in a new-made land, a world scarce wakened out of chaos. The whole country seems still in its primitive form, and I could swear that not a stone has been moved since the fabled autumn evening when the sun went down upon the death of Gralon.

Suddenly a cry, a loud sinister shriek, that rips its

way through the solitude. Out of the bosom of a hill-side rushes a train, and, in the form of shaking, rattling carriages, civilization passes, taking no heed of the sweet fancies it crushes, nor of the grand old symbols it destroys. The sad prophecy of Yann Ar Minouz comes back to my memory. Shall we, indeed, ever again hear the singers at the Pardon of Rumengol?

Modest, charming Spirit of old Breton Song, thy votaries are becoming few indeed. In the new order of things it will pay better to be an innkeeper than a Bard. Old weavers, country tailors, poor shepherds, wandering sabotiers, these are now the only followers of thy simple, heartfelt worship. Thy sweet voice is destined to be hushed for ever, together with the sound of the last spinning-wheel. To those generations that have loved and cherished thee others have succeeded, who are too busy to listen, too worldly to understand.

Modest, charming Spirit of old Breton Song, thou who through so many ages hast borne on thy wings the hope of our race, how sadly do I dream of that hour when thou shalt be no more.



THE PROCESSION OF SAINT JEAN DU DOIGE

BOOK III.—SAINT JEAN-DU-DOIGT

THE PARDON OF FIRE

DEDICATED TO MADAME ÉMILE CLOAREC

CHAPTER I

THE festival of the summer solstice, which in other regions has almost degenerated into a merry-making, is still celebrated in Brittany, with as deep and intense a faith as that of primitive man when he knelt and adored the sun.

During the night of the twenty-third of June, it is no exaggeration to say, that from the highlands in the centre, to the low-lying coast, or, in Breton words, from Argoat to Armor, there is not a village, a hamlet, a farm lying solitary in the midst of its fields, no, nor even a sabotier's hut, buried beneath the woodland covert, where the inhabitants do not consecrate the symbolical log, invoking the sacred flame or prostrating themselves around the ashes, according to the particular cult they follow. Through the course of ages, the meaning of the various rites has been lost, but forms and gestures remain exactly as they were thousands of years ago.

In another book,* I have attempted to describe one

* "Pâques d'Islande."

of these "Nights of Fire," such as I witnessed it among the mountains in one of the wildest parts of the Aré. But the place most renowned as the centre, the special sanctuary of the old solar worship, is on the western border of Trégor, a flowery spot, covered with golden gorse, lying close to the Cap du Primel. There, protected from the sharp winds of the Channel, lies the hidden, delicious vale of Traoun-Mériadek.

Mériadek is a name greatly revered in the neighbourhood. Legend tells us that he who bore it was a person of noble race, grand-nephew of King Conan, that Pharamond of Brittany. Albert of Morlaix says that he died Bishop of Vannes, after having lived for many, many years in solitude with no other companion than a clerk, and mentions as his abode a spot very suitable for such a life, not far from the town of Pontivy. But the people of Traoun-Mériadek resent this tradition. "Every one has a right to his own saint," say they. "Mériadek belongs to us! He never went away from our neighbourhood since the blessed day, when, having left the land of the Saxon, with his brother Primel, he came in a hollow rock garlanded with seaweed to this haven. The country was pleasant, sheltered, full of shady trees, cheerful with the song of running waters. Said Mériadek to Primel—

"'I am the elder, I have first choice; I should like to stay here. As for you, brother, go where God leads you, and peace be with you.'

"As Primel bowed his head in acquiescence, he saw a round stone lying at his feet. Picking it up, he brandished it aloft, and threw it in front of him. As it touched the ground it began rolling along like a ball

towards the sunset, and Primel followed, only stopping where the stone finally stopped, on the rocky shore of Plougaznou, where, so says the legend, the stone had dwelt before the sea tore it from its native rock. And Saint Mériadek remained here with us, till the time when Saint John the Baptist joined him as patron of our church."

That is to say, Mériadek suffered the fate of many of our old national miracle-workers. Some time in the early part of the fifteenth century, he was, if not exactly banished, obliged to yield his place to a newer form of worship. No doubt he was not considered sufficiently orthodox, too many pagan elements remained mingled with the devotion of which he was the object. Even in our own days, the people of these parts are extremely conservative and intractable, and a hundred years ago, when the traveller Cambry came among them, he was struck by their ominous reserve, and the rude way in which they proclaimed themselves "rough lads of the sea-coast." Pôtrede called an Arvorik. Cut off from the world by ramparts of steep hills, and by an ocean bristling with rocks, they have remained obstinately attached to beliefs and practices thousands and thousands of years old. Perhaps in no other region of Brittany has the ancient Celtic nature-worship remained so unaltered as in this valley of Traoun-Mériadek. The natural features of the place have contributed to this, quite as much as the circumstances of the people themselves. On all sides fountains can be heard: they spring up in the fields and meadows, they flow out of the very rock itself, giving to the landscape a sense of endless fertility, of a never-failing bosom pouring forth

strength, freshness, health, yea, life itself. What wonder that pilgrims of all time have knelt in adoration on the margins of these sacred *divonnes*?

And then lift your eyes to the heights around! Notice the great solemn promontories where the Sun, the Breton Hëol, own brother to Helios the Greek, walks every summer morning, wrapped in the first pure shimmerings of his delicate light, and at evening, leaves his long rays of sumptuous purple trailing behind him. Is it surprising that generations of Celts have looked upon this place as his sanctuary, an open temple dedicated to him whom still they call "the King of Stars," the god whose radiant presence is all the sweeter to them, from being so rarely vouchsafed in their sombre climate?

As it was quite impossible to destroy these pagan customs, Christianity tried, as we know, to turn them to her own account. She raised chapels near the fountains, placed figures of the Virgin in crannies of the sacred oak trees, sanctified the old myths by adopting them as her own, substituting the names of saints for those of the old gods. And so no doubt it came to pass that good Mériadek, fabulous Bishop of Vannes, was called upon to receive the worship hitherto addressed to the sun in this corner of Trégor. There are many things about him that justify this theory. A certain Mystery Play, precious remnant of a lost dialect, shows him to us endowed with the gift of light, dissipating the darkness of sightless eyes, opening the shadowed understanding to behold the Light of lights.

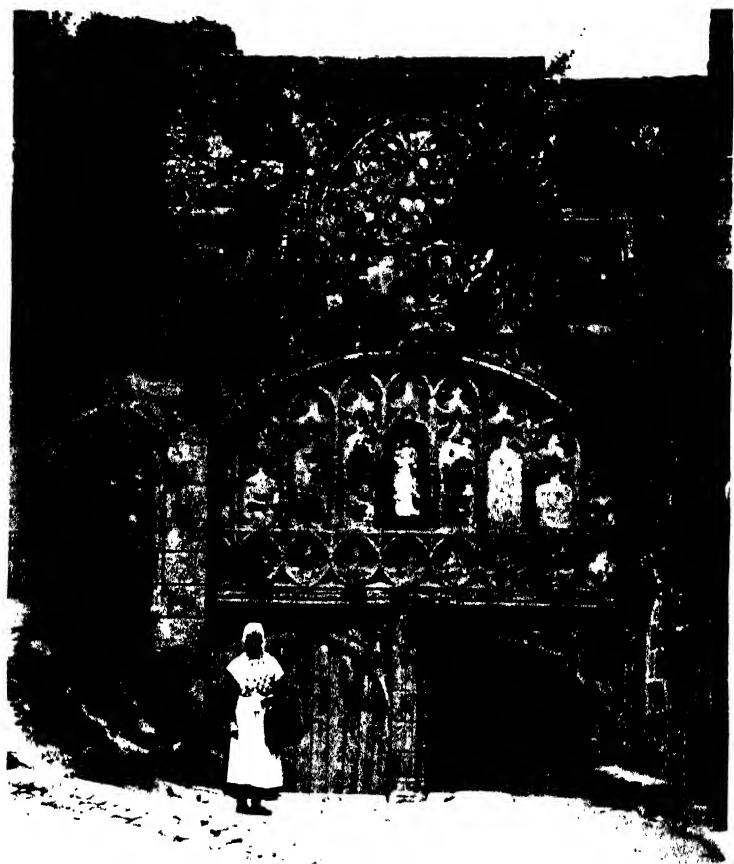
We must, however, conclude that the worship of Saint Mériadek had scarcely the desired effect on the

pagan customs. The Breton soul is rather like the soil on which it dwells. You think you have dug to the bottom, and burned out the very germs of the weeds. Let it lie fallow for a year ; the following spring the roots will revive, and gorse, broom, all the original vegetation, will flower as freshly as ever.

Now, in the fifteenth century the popularity of Saint Mériadek was probably on the wane. The ancient pagan undergrowth, still alive and deeply vigorous, had, innocently enough, invaded the new cult, covering and half stifling it. All this was in the natural order of things, and only to be expected ; besides—who can tell ? even the clergy themselves had most likely lost faith in the powers of this superannuated saint. There is a fashion in saints, which is subject to change like everything else in this world. In Brittany our fathers have had many proofs of this.

Renan has told us the history of a certain statue of Saint Budoc, which the curé, under pretence that it had become shabby, surreptitiously replaced by a figure, of our Lady of Lourdes. What a number of similar tricks might be cited ! Long would be the list of Breton parishes in which the old Celtic saint has had to give way to Saint Peter. In fact, that task of Romanizing Brittany, which maddened the Emperor's legions is being slowly brought about by the very Breton priests themselves. They very soon began to denationalize the religion of their flocks, and partially succeeded. Saint Mériadek is only one of many victims. One fine day somebody noticed that he was lacking in distinction, and almost immediately his humble chapel was transformed into a spacious church, in which the good

old saint was tolerated as a guest, but where the real lord and master from that time forward was Saint John the Baptist. Even the valley changed its name. No longer was it known as Traoun-Mériadek ; henceforward it was the commune of Saint Jean-du-Doigt.



THE GATEWAY OF THE OLD ABBEY AT MORLAIN

CHAPTER II

WHEN these substitutions have taken place, especially in such remote periods as that of which we are speaking, it is often difficult, not to say impossible, to discover the circumstances under which they occurred. Those who brought them about were naturally not anxious to perpetuate the memory of their deeds ; in fact, they rather endeavoured to wipe out the remembrance of the older tradition, in order to strengthen the position of its successor. But in the present instance we have the good fortune to know the whole story, thanks to that most credulous, most unreliable, but most charming of Breton legendaries, Albert Legrand.

He lived in the first half of the seventeenth century, this Père Albert, at Morlaix, where he had been born, and near to where, in the abbey of Cuburien, he had become a monk. He had an educated mind, and at the same time a singularly childlike soul. Like the peasants from whom he had sprung, he delighted in story and legend, and his passion for the marvellous was insatiable. Towards the saints of his country, the "Patron Saints," as he called them, his devotion was boundless ; their surprising travels, the wealth and variety of their adventures, enchanted him. And these legends were for the most part unwritten, left to the unsafe keeping of the human memory. It seemed to him that he could

not do a more Christian, and at the same time more truly Breton work, than to gather together and establish them in a book. So, as soon as he had obtained permission from his superiors, he began his great work.

And a great work it was! To begin with, he had to travel about all over Brittany, visiting it in detail, examining manuscripts, questioning the people, stopping at every church and little oratory where any one connected with our golden legend had left the impress of his feet or the perfume of his virtues. From that time forward no one was to be seen on the roads save Albert of Morlaix. He was a kind of Breton Pausanias. He talked to the peasants in their own tongue, which in Brittany is the only *open sesame*. Being a Franciscan monk, all presbyteries were open to him; but even there he was not content simply to converse with the rectors, but would go into the kitchens, and gossip with the housekeepers, the Carabassenn. Nobody felt shy with him, so they told him all they knew, and he, fervent pilgrim that he was, drank it in with all his ears, thus gathering sheaf by sheaf his wonderful harvest.

On his return to Cuburien, that calm place of trees and waters, where from his cell of an evening he could watch the sails and listen to the songs of the fisher-folk, he carefully arranged the notes he had taken during his wanderings, building up through the quiet hours of the night his huge work, his "Vie des Saints de la Bretagne Armorique," finding the utmost delight in gathering together the scattered fragments of Breton theogony, containing as it does history, romance, epic-poetry, and fairy tale. Indeed, Albert Legrand united in himself something of Homer, of Hesiod, of Herodotus, and of

Plutarch. He was the first and most delightfully innocent of all our folklorists.

No road was better known to him than that leading to Plougaznou, the great sea-board parish upon which in his days depended the chaplaincy of Saint Jean-du-Doigt. Even at that time it was much used by the good folks of Morlaix, who found it a charming and interesting excursion. French and English tourists were not the first to discover the massive geological structures that buttress and support the Point du Primel. The people of those days also loved to lie in the great shadows, on the thick fine carpet of grass that clothes the base of the huge rocks, and watch the magnificent horror of the sea, bristling even on calm days with glittering, crested waves, breaking over the faces of black reefs, which no doubt reminded *them*, too, of monstrous unicorns. Brother Albert would have been no Breton had he not felt, through all his being, the magical charm of nature ; and the lifelong study of his native saints served but to intensify this characteristic. He had noticed that in choosing their homes, his heroes had been guided no less by æsthetic instincts than religious considerations. While fleeing the world, so as to approach nearer to God, they certainly did not deprive themselves of the beauties of nature. They loved vast spaces, through which to roam in prayer and contemplation. Their abodes of penitence sometimes looked forth over solemn reaches of forest, but more often faced the boundless infinity of the sea.

Whether he is speaking of the English Channel, or of the great Atlantic, Albert Legrand never mentions the sea without a certain deep tenderness. It is plain

that he loved her with the changeless love that all must feel who have been born within sound of her waves.

But it was not only on account of the sea that he had a partiality for Plougaznou and Saint Jean-du-Doigt. He was attracted by the annual *fêtes*, which drew such enormous crowds of pilgrims from all over Brittany. The remote little valley on the confines of Trégor had become, during the hundred years preceding his time, the favourite haunt of national fervour. Its miraculous reputation had spread through the whole peninsula, and had even been recognized officially. Dukes of Brittany had taken the humble ravine under their special patronage, and had contributed towards the building of a fine new church on the site of the ancient sanctuary. Moreover, they continued to show their interest by presents of various kinds, precious reliquaries, heavily embroidered banners, gold monstrances, silver crosses covered with bells.

In the year of grace, fifteen hundred and six, the last and most significant seal was set to the glory of Traoun-Mériadek. Queen Anne, who, even on the throne of France, kept her nickname of "Petite Brette," obtained permission from her royal husband, Louis the Twelfth, to return and comfort the soul of her native land. She wished to see everything, to make her Trô-Breiz according to the custom of that time, when no Breton thought he had done his duty unless he had, at least once during his life, made the "Pilgrimage of the Seven Saints," visiting in their own cathedrals the seven patriarchal apostles, the seven spiritual chiefs of Brittany. Starting from Nantes, she passed by Guérande, Vannes, Quimper, visited Notre-Dame du

Folgoët, and so arrived by Saint Pol at Morlaix, where a magnificent reception awaited her. She came, however, in bad health. Albert of Morlaix tells us that "a defluxion had fallen upon her left eye." It was but natural that she should be told of the remedy that lay so close at hand, such an opportunity was too good to lose; she must certainly become a patroness of Saint Jean-du-Doigt. She did not require much urging, but, quite transported by the marvels they told her of the place, requested to be taken there on foot, like the humblest pilgrim. The utmost she would allow was to be carried in a litter a portion of the way. A little past the village of Kermouster, just at the top of the high bare ridge, Lann ar Festour, she insisted on alighting. A calvary rose from the midst of the gorse bushes by the edge of the road, and there, according to tradition, seating herself on the step, she took off her shoes, and barefoot, as the poem has it, like the true Bretonne she was, made her way to Saint Jean. I need scarcely add that she was immediately cured, and proved herself royally grateful. She began by ennobling all the inhabitants of the little town, making "a race of gentlemen, from a clan of simple fisher-folk." Then, as the church was not quite finished, she gave the where-withal to complete it. And finally, it was she who conceived the idea of founding a well-appointed hostel for the crowds of pilgrims who every year came to Traoun-Mériadek, and were obliged, for want of other accommodation, to sleep on the open threshing-floors, or in the meadows.

Over many other gifts I must pass in silence, none of them were equal in value to her visit itself. The

place could not fail to prosper now ; had it not the most glorious of all names entered in its registers ? The blessed Duchess, La Douce des Douces, figured among the number of its healed !

In the days of Albert of Morlaix its fortunes probably reached their climax. Every twenty-third of June, the all-too-narrow valley was crowded by thousands and tens of thousands of devotees, who covered the hillsides, and spread even to the seashore. So many people wishing to confess, to communicate, to be directed in the complicated details of the rites, which I shall endeavour presently to describe ! Even to-day the local clergy could not possibly manage it unaided ; how much less two hundred years ago ? It was therefore usual for the priests of the neighbouring parishes to come to their assistance ; and no doubt the chief reinforcement arrived from that hive of monks, Cuburien. And among them, surely one of the first to offer himself for the task would be that most zealous worshipper of Breton saints and holy places, Father Albert. Who better qualified than he, to preside at these solemn assemblies of the Breton faithful, he who had devoted his whole life to the reconstruction of their history, the unravelment of their origins ? It is said that when people caught sight of the old man in Morlaix, they would remark to one another, " See, there goes that man who has been to paradise and talked to our saints ! "

He was just as well known in the country as in the town, and as well beloved—a rare privilege, for it does not appear that in Brittany the religious orders have ever been very popular. The memory of the people has not been kind to them, and songs, ballads, and legends

have alike treated them with a spite that has sometimes become positively ferocious. There are even some that rank the monk among the most terrible of scourges, along with leprosy, famine, and plague. Father Albert, is perhaps the only example who has been quite spared by the vindictive peasantry.

"Oh, he?" said an old spinner of Lannion, when one day we were talking of him; "there have never been two men of his kind. I have heard tell, that once during his lifetime, he made the journey to heaven, and that ever afterwards as he walked about the country, people could tell when he was coming by the sweet scent that came from his clothes."

All round about Morlaix, and even further away, no great Pardon was ever held without him. I can picture him to myself, climbing the dusty hills in his brown Franciscan gown, bare-headed beneath the hot sun, to whose *fête* he is going, respectfully saluted by all the pilgrims he passes, mingling with them, speaking to them in their own tongue, or better still, drawing them out and getting them to talk to him. . . . Then again it is evening; dusk is falling in the green valley. And in the presbytery garden, vast as that of some abbey, hidden between the high green walls of the alleys, the gentle monk, who sometimes makes us think of the founder of his order, Francis of Assisi, meditates among the sweet scent of the honey-suckle on the sermon he is to preach at early Mass on the morrow, while overhead great flocks of martins wheel and chatter. Perhaps in the luminous dusk of that summer evening, he reads over to Mons. Guillaume le Roux of Plougaznou the Ode in Latin distiches, which in 1605 was published in his *Nugæ*

poeticæ. . . . Or he turns over his mental MS. respecting that "noble and discreet Yves Legrand—" perhaps one of his own ancestors, a canon of Léon, and almoner of Duke Francis the second—whose memoirs, half eaten by worms, he has unearthed from the great treasure-chests in the sacristy of Saint Jean. Then, just as the light is failing, he strains his eyes trying to decipher once more (restoring it here and there with the aid of "a secret that he possesses") the almost illegible writing of an old, old chart, written by a lord of Pen-ar-Prat, in Guimaëc, which, according to his opinion, is nothing more nor less than the authentic account of the visit of Queen Anne to Saint Jean, and the supernatural manifestations that occurred during that visit.

And now that we know his text, let us get as near to his pulpit as possible, and listen to his sermon. The yelping chorus of beggars has quieted down in the graveyard, and a dense crowd fills the nave, spreading out through the porch into the open, where it can be seen standing motionless and quiet among the tombs. Let us try for awhile to have the same simple faith as these pilgrims, while the good Franciscan tells us the story of "The Miraculous Translation of the Finger of Saint John the Baptist, from Normandy to Brittany, on the first day of August."



BEGGARS AT THE PARDON OF SAINT JEAN-DU-DOIGT

CHAPTER III

YOU must know that after the beheading of the great Forerunner, his body was taken away by his disciples and buried near the town of Sébaste, where his tomb soon became the centre of a number of most wonderful miracles. Even in the days of Julian the Apostate, these marvels were still so frequent that their report reached the ears of the prince. Furious, he ordered the holy relics to be exhumed, burned, and their ashes scattered to the winds of heaven. Nothing loth, the Gentiles hastened to obey the command; but as soon as the fire was lighted the rain began to fall, and that so heavily, that the flames were quite extinguished. Some Christians, who were on the watch, managed to save a few of the bones, and put them in a place of safety, some entire, others half consumed, so that afterwards they might share them, and spread them about in different parts of the world.

It would be tedious to follow each of the relics in its wanderings, though Father Albert does not fail to do so. Let us confine our attention to the index finger of the right hand, the finger with which Saint John pointed to our Saviour, while he uttered the great prophetic words, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The people of Malta profess to have this finger themselves, but Father Albert thinks that their word must not be taken too seriously.

He says that they may very likely possess one of the other fingers of the Baptist's right hand, but of the first finger there can be no question. Our Bretons would die rather than give up their claim to its authenticity. The true finger is at Plougaznou, and nowhere else; even the manner in which it got there proves that!

In the commune of Buhulien, on the banks of the Léguer, a little chapel slumbers, hushed by the regular tick-tack of a mill. There it lies, of no particular style or age, hidden away in one of the most romantic of the valleys of Trégor, a rude place of prayer, surrounded by fields, whence, on the day of its annual Pardon, the Lannion labourers come to gambol. All through the rest of the year, it has no other visitors than cowherds and one or two pilgrims, who remain faithful to the ancient cult of which it is the centre. Within, just above the only altar, stands the figure of a saint dressed in the white robe of a maiden, the martyr's palm in her hand, and around her feet, a sheaf of flames, that mount towards, but never reach her. She is called Tècle, or, as the Bretons say, Tékla. This poor house of prayer is, I believe, the only place in Brittany consecrated to her. An unfinished legend tells us something of her story.

She was a native of Iconium, and one of the first converts of Saint Paul. Her mother wished her to marry, but rather than do so she was willing to suffer the most cruel tortures. Condemned to be burned alive, she sprang of her own accord into the fire; but immediately the flames drew back, refusing to injure her body, or to soil her dress. At the same time the rain began to fall, extinguishing the fire, to the consternation of the executioners. You will notice that the same

intervention took place as at the burning of the Baptist's body; can this be the reason why Tékla passed afterwards for one of those pious people who helped to carry his relics to Western Europe? Albert Legrand gives us no help about all this; he is only interested in the history of his own country, and Tékla, foreign saint that she was, does not concern him. It is not even likely that he ever visited the shady valley of the Léguer, where the roof of her little chapel rises, like that of a sabotier's hut, from among the tall grasses that surround it. He tells us with his usual candour, that all he knows of this young girl is, that at some date of which he is ignorant, she made a present to a certain town in Normandy of the precious finger.

One of Father Albert's commentators, Mons. de Kerdanet, thinks he has discovered the name of this town. According to him, it was the village of Saint Jean du Day, in the neighbourhood of Saint Lô. A great lord of this district, wherever it was, had in his service a Breton of Plougaznou, but we are not told in what capacity. As, however, our historian explains that it was during the time when the French, led by Jeanne d'Arc and Richemont, finished driving the last of the English from Normandy, we may presume that our Trégorrois (pity it is, as the writer says, that we do not know his worthy name)—it is to be presumed, I say, that our Trégorrois was engaged to fight the hereditary foe, the hated Saxon. There were many Breton youths who sold themselves, willingly enough, to serve during this Hundred Years' War. Even the women, glowing with mystic enthusiasm, started forth as upon a crusade. The story is still told of the humble devotee, La

Pierronne, who, led away by her dreams, set out, chaplet in hand, with no other companion than a peasant girl, and who, if she did not attain to the glorious celebrity of "La Pucelle," had at least this in common with her, that she obeyed the same call, and died the same death.

All this makes it probable that our young man of Plougaznou had hired himself out as a soldier. . . . His engagement finished, he set forth on his way home. He returned much richer than he started, though with a kind of riches that showed how entirely he was a son of his country and race. While those soldiers, who had been drawn from other parts of France to fight under his lord's banner, sought to enrich themselves with spoil, as was customary in those days, imagine what was the kind of booty this Breton coveted above all other treasure? . . . The finger of Saint John, do you say? Yes, you have guessed right! Every time he attended Mass or Vespers in the church (for a Breton is as conscientious about his prayers as his fighting), he could not turn away his eyes from the reliquary, in which the blessed finger was exposed to view. Not that he ever dreamed of stealing it—such a sacrilegious idea would have been horrible to his devout soul! "And yet," thought he, sadly, "*what* a present it would be for my parish church!"

The evening before his departure arrived, and for the last time he went to his accustomed place before the altar, to say farewell to the holy finger. For a long time he remained prostrate, projecting all the powers of his being towards the object he so earnestly desired. When he rose he was surprised to feel himself quite another man; not only had he ceased to experience any

regret at going away, but a strange activity had taken possession of his limbs, and a mysterious joy exalted his heart and mind. He set out with so light a step that it was as though he had wings. He scarcely walked, he was borne along. The steep roads, worn into deep ruts, and still paved here and there by enormous flagstones, seemed to melt away beneath his feet, becoming soft and pleasant as the carpet before an altar. As he passed, the grass on the high bank thrilled as though it were alive; the trees bent down towards him in respectful homage, and their leaves gave forth a rustling of indistinct words, a pious murmuring, like a prayer sung in unison; even the stones moved aside for him.

At the first village he passed through, on the evening of that day, he produced an even stranger phenomenon. All the bells of all the steeples began ringing of their own accord, though the churches were already closed for the night; and this Breton lad was received with a triumphant peal such as had never been heard before; no, not even at the visit of the archbishop! The terrified peasants took it for a call to arms, and when at last they found all the cause of this musical uproar to be nothing but a ragged vagabond, with the vacant manner of a fool, they stopped him. When questioned, he had nothing to say; besides, how could he, with his Plougaznou dialect, understand these Normans? So he was accused of sorcery, and thrown into jail, till he could be sent up for trial. However, he was in no way dismayed, but went peacefully to sleep, and dreamed that he was seated on the hillside, above Traoun-Mériadek, on the spot where, from time immemorial, the Tantan, or Sacred Fire has been lighted. When he

woke in the morning he looked vainly around for the sombre walls of the prison. He found that his dream had become reality, and that, in fact, he *was* seated on the fine, sweet-scented grass of the Breton hillside. Of the cell there was no trace. Overhead, in place of the stone vaulting, stretched the infinity of the open sky. The flaming August sun was just rising from among the last mists of dawn ; the rosy drops that night had left hanging from the spiders' webs in the gorse bushes, sparkled like rubies and diamonds, and away in the north, the misty mirrors of the sea reflected the delicate rainbow hues of the sun's earliest rays. The wanderer gave a sigh of relief, for was he not once more in his native land ? His eyes wandered over the familiar objects around him ; the voices of his fatherland sounded in his ears ; while behind its moss-grown enclosure murmured a magic fountain, which more than once he had consulted about his destiny. Rising towards him from the depths of the valley, the bells of Saint Mériadek sounded a clear, gay chime.

He rose and made his way down the steep descent. At that time the village consisted of only two or three cottages. The wheelwright, the innkeeper, each gave a "Good day" to the traveller, recognizing him as a fellow-countryman. Never even turning his head, however, by way of answer, he crossed the steps into the churchyard and hastened towards the chapel, where morning service was about to begin. A congregation of faithful women had assembled, kneeling, to hear Mass, and our friend took his place among them, bowing himself in prayer. Suddenly, as he knelt, with folded hands, it seemed to him that his right palm opened. No blood flowed, but

from the gaping wound something shot forth, flew over the rail of the choir, and alighted from the epistle side on the cloth of the High Altar. At the same moment the candles flamed up, though no one had lighted them, and in the tower the bells (whose cords were pulled by no mortal hands) broke forth triumphantly, sending the most superb carillon to the four corners of heaven.

You can imagine the crowd that gathered in the old chapel! Everybody came running from all the country round about: noble ladies ambling down towards Traoun-Mériadek on their palfreys; harvestmen, though it was August, leaving their sickles among the corn, and coming, just as they were, in their shirt-sleeves, all disordered by labour. I need scarcely say that among them were the relatives of the young Breton. As soon as they had embraced him, they cried: "What is it all about? Oh, what is it all about?"

It certainly was all about that object which had so strangely sprung from the arm of the soldier on to the altar, and that, as you have no doubt guessed, was the finger of Saint John! The precious relic had not been able to support the idea of being separated from its devoted adorer, and, lodged between the skin and the flesh without his knowledge, had given the Normans the slip, and come to settle in Brittany all for love of the soldier.

CHAPTER IV

SUCH, with a few popular additions, is the outline of the legend of which the pious historian of Morlaix has left us a record. How much truth is there in it all? and are we actually to believe that this lad of Plougaznou carried away with him, if not between his skin and flesh, perhaps at the bottom of his knapsack, the fruit of his pious theft? This is a very difficult question, which I certainly cannot undertake to answer! It is, however, worth notice, that, according to Father Albert, the whole affair happened in the reign of Duke John, the fifth of that name; that this duke fought a great deal in Normandy against the English, and that he was singularly addicted to religion, never losing an opportunity of showering his magnificent bounty upon his favourite churches. It was he, who, when a prisoner of the Lord of Clisson, vowed, that if he were set at liberty, he would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; and he, too, who not finding suitable leisure to go himself, sent in his place, "*Un homme notable, et suffisant*," with instructions to offer a gift of a hundred gold florins at the holy sepulchre.

He was no less liberal towards the Breton churches, as you may see by referring to the registers of their treasures. He founded Masses, and gave pious gifts to Saint Julian de Vouvantes, to Notre Dame du Méné,

to Notre Dame du Bodon, and also to Notre Dame de Brélévenez, that stands perched so prettily at the top of its three hundred stone steps on the green hill by Lannion. Was it not he, also, who built a tomb covered with silver in the cathedral of Tréguier, dedicated to the memory of Saint Yves? And who shall tell of the princely gifts he lavished on the church of Le Folgoët! The clergy of Plougaznou must often have envied this gilded hand, that rained gifts on every church save theirs. What they coveted was not so much the gifts themselves, as the glory of them. It is very hard to see all other cults prospering, while one's own church remains poor, and one's neighbourhood of no account. Doubtless, there was this pilgrimage every twenty-fourth of June to the chapel of Saint Mériadek, this Pardon of Fire, as it was called. But quite apart from its very questionable orthodoxy, the crowd of rough peasants who came to it were scarcely likely to give it that *éclat* which would attract the notice of the duke.

Ah, if only one among the rustics might develop into a saint, like that worthy innocent, Salaün, whose heavenly visions during the preceding century had made the fortune of Notre Dame du Folgoët!

It is said that a great wish often ends by accomplishing its own object, and we know that in no other country is the spirit of mysticism so strong as in Brittany. Legend comes about quite easily and naturally, and that of the finger of Saint Jean, born under the shady branches of Traoun-Mériadek, soon spread its wings and flew away, on the lips of men, to the ears of Duke John the fifth himself. He had in his court a certain Mériadek Guicaznou, whose name reveals his

birthplace, who was not behindhand in telling his master of the wonderful miracle that had taken place in his native village. It was a clever and charming story, just the thing to please the popular imagination. But for the duke himself it must have had a special interest, and that for two reasons. First, because this conquest of the relic had been effected by one of his own men-at-arms; and also because the finger had belonged to Saint John, his special patron. So that, even if, as that stern Benedictine Dom Lobineau would have us believe, the legend was invented from first to last, it was, at all events, sure to bring about the happiest of good fortune, for Plougaznou.

And, in fact, from that day forward, the rustic solitude of Traoun-Mériadek was glorified and celebrated. Ducal favour was extended towards it, shown first by moderate offerings, such as a silver reliquary to contain the precious finger. Then followed large sums of money, to permit of the erection of a nave capable of holding the multitude of gentlefolks, who, as soon as the prince had taken this corner of the earth under his mighty protection, came riding toward it, by the narrow, stony paths trodden hitherto by none but peasants. Less than three years after the date which Albert Legrand gives, as that of the translation of the finger, that is to say, 1540, the foundation stone of the present church was laid on the site of the old, original chapel, and Saint Jean-du-Doigt became one of the great pilgrimage shrines of Brittany.

At the end of the eighteenth century its prestige had not declined. Cambry, who visited it during the Directoire, speaks of it in terms which, if somewhat

irreverent, as befitted a follower of Voltaire, show none the less, that it was still enjoying a great prosperity : "Nothing has been neglected," says he, "that will help to strike the imagination of the numberless pilgrims, who flock to this place of miracles and enchantments. The lanes leading to it are sacred. Here and there, rudely sculptured saints, painted and gilded, stand on the roadside beside inns, where heads grow muddled by brandy fumes."

When the Revolution passed away, and the church of Saint Jean reopened its doors, the rich treasure was intact ; not one of the magnificent ornaments was missing ; even the monuments had in no way suffered. You will search vainly for any trace of those acts of barbarism that so sadly left their marks on other churches, and it goes without saying, that the credit of this miracle was given to the precious relic. The folks of the village declared that at night they had seen the great archangels, flaming sword in hand, fighting before the windows.

But this was not the only marvel they had to tell.

It happened in '93, Robespierre's year. As it had been proposed by the laity, in default of the usual religious services, to celebrate the Tantad, a republican of Plougaznou came, in the name of the commissioners of the district, to forbid the lighting of the Sacred Fire, with a threat that, if the order were disobeyed, the guilty persons would have to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The prospect of prison, and possible guillotine, frightened the boldest. The traditional fire was not lighted. But at the very hour when it was usual to plunge in the first flaming brand, a huge fiery

glow suddenly spread over the night sky, in the direction of Plougaznou ; and such was the violence of the flames that their reflection lighted up the distant sea. The republican of Plougaznou rushed frantically towards the spot. It was *his* farm that was blazing. When he reached the height on which it had stood, he found nothing but a heap of glowing embers. Of all his many cattle, the finest in the countryside, not one was left ; they had been burned alive in their stables. For days afterwards the smoke of their roasted flesh lay over the country like the terrible vapour from some great burnt-offering.

The culprit was sought everywhere, but in vain. In fact, no one doubted that Saint John himself had wrought this vengeance, by means of which he had prevented a far more terrible catastrophe. For it is a local saying, that if no fire be lighted at the *fête* of Saint Jean-du-Doigt, no sun will be seen through all the succeeding year.

CHAPTER V

THE sun! It was at the touch of his first rays that I opened my eyes on June the twenty-third, 1898, to find myself in the hospitable dwelling of Kerséline. And never, I think, had his light appeared more beautiful to me than in this calm, Arcadian scene of wooded hills, among which, with supple, sparkling radiance, wound the flowing curves of the Morlaix river. It almost seemed as though the great orb was conscious that his *fête* was about to be celebrated. He glittered through the fine morning mists with a soft, opalescent radiance. His kiss ran over the sloping verdure of the hills in a silent waterfall of golden spray; then strewed with gems the green sward beside the river; painted the towing-path all purple; spangled the gravel bank with gold-dust; and finally, spread in long quivering sheets over the estuary, whose still, shrouded face suddenly brightened and flushed with the coming of the life-blood. . . .

"Come," cried a friendly voice beneath my window, "the Locquéholé boats must be getting under sail."

Years ago it was usual for pilgrims living near the coast to go to the Pardon of Saint John by sea. From the havens of Léon and Trégor hundreds of little boats would set sail at dawn, bearing whole parishes towards the other-time deserted bay of Traoun-Mériadek. Old folks of the countryside still tell with enthusiastic regret

of these nautical processions. At the head of each miniature fleet, like some foreign galley, sailed a newly painted, splendidly decorated fishing-boat. During the previous night the women had garlanded it with flowers, and sheafs of iris, bunches of hollyhocks, hydrangeas, and sunflowers ornamented its bows. The processional cross, the heavy silver or golden cross, on which little bells hung tinkling, was lashed firmly to the top of the high mast. On the white, draped deck was fastened the image of the patron saint, for in those days the very saints themselves went on pilgrimage. If they were left behind they would quit their niches, we are told, and reach the porch of Saint Jean by some supernatural, inexplicable route of their own, so the greatest care was always taken to bring them. Around the image stood the clergy, the sacristan, the choristers, all robed, and singing in unison the proper hymn :—

“Sceptriger vasti moderator orbis. . . .”

And thus to the sound of singing the sacred boat sailed on its way, followed by twenty or thirty humbler craft, which in the intervals between the verses took up the song like a refrain :—

“Nempe divini Digitum Prophetæ. . . .”

The voices spread out beneath the resounding sky, till a vast gladness seemed to stretch over the sea. . . . But to-day these sacred pageants are a thing of the past, and perhaps it is as well ; they had their risks. In Brittany the weather that promises best is often the most treacherous, and all along the torn coast, bristling, as it does, with rocks and shreds of islands, the Channel

currents have a strength as terrible as invisible. The boatmen know it well, and under ordinary circumstances are careful enough. But what would you have! The Pardon of Saint Jean-du-Doigt only happens once a year. What accident *could* come on such a day? Away with everyday precautions! It would be an insult to the saint not to put all one's trust in him! So they would hoist the sail gaily, and start off merrily enough. The bells rang, canticles floated through the summer air, till a pious intoxication (perhaps even another kind of excitement; something less ideal) raised their spirits, and made them less watchful. Who dreamed of changes in the sky, treacheries in the sea, then? Suddenly, when the boats, crowded with human beings, reached the rough waters of the open sea, they would be found heavy to steer, tiring, almost unmanageable. If even a puff of wind caught them abeam there was a possibility of disaster, even in the finest weather; and if instead of a puff a storm sprang up, one of those sudden June storms that break forth as soon as conceived, sweeping the sea like a round of grape-shot, then the catastrophe would be inevitable; boat and passengers would disappear for ever!

The fasts preceding the Pardon of Saint Jean have often been overshadowed by such disasters, but I need scarcely say that every one has done their best to make a forget of them. There is not one inscription to be found in the graveyard of Traoun-Mériadek recording the numbers or dates of such losses. The chapels of Paimpol contain many short inscriptions commemorative of fishing-boats swallowed up among the fiords of *Iceland*, but of *these* wrecks, nothing! No mention of

the many pilgrims engulfed, no word to appease their spirits! You must not conclude, however, that their memory has entirely perished. The people's muse has show herself pitiful towards some of them, and has embalmed them with her tears.

I spent several years of my childhood at the little town of Ploumilliau, near Lannion. There at regular intervals a very curious individual would appear, whom our world of boys always hailed with the greatest delight. He was called Nonnic Plougaznou. Plougaznou because, I suppose, he came from that part of the country; Nonnic (diminutive of Yves, or Yvon) because, despite his advanced age, he had remained, physically and mentally, a poor little scrap of a creature. He was, in fact, a tiny old man, scarcely taller than ourselves, though we were all small boys, who had not made our first communion. Had it not been for his figure, his proportions, above all, for his grey hair, any one might well have taken him for a child, as we led him along in our midst, with his round, beardless face, soft wrinkles, more like rolls of fat, mouth always laughing at nothing particular, and eyes clear and limpid as a stream—eyes whose truthfulness had never been shadowed. It was a strange riddle of a face—that of an infant sexagenarian, an aged cherub. And as for his soul, nothing could equal its sweet simplicity! He called himself, as he believed himself, the son of a king, and in order that his dress might correspond with his birth, he made it a rule never to wear clothes like those of any one else. And, certainly, the strangeness of his costume did give him a certain resemblance to the scion of some negro monarch. He had, moreover, all the passion of the savage

for civilized tinsel, and people used to flatter this innocent taste by putting aside all kinds of out-of-date and extravagant garments for him, in which he would proudly appear. I have seen Nonnik Plougaznou arrayed in sky-blue coats, dating back to the time of the Revolution; hussars' waistcoats that must have been through the battlefields of the empire; red shirts that had been worn by the followers of Garibaldi, and reached that far Western land through, who shall say, what adventures! There was only one article of his costume that never varied—his high hat, green with rain, burned by the sun, ragged and bruised, a melancholy, crumbling ruin, encircled with a crown of artificial flowers. This crown was to Nonnik the emblem of his royalty, and he would have died sooner than allow any one to touch it.

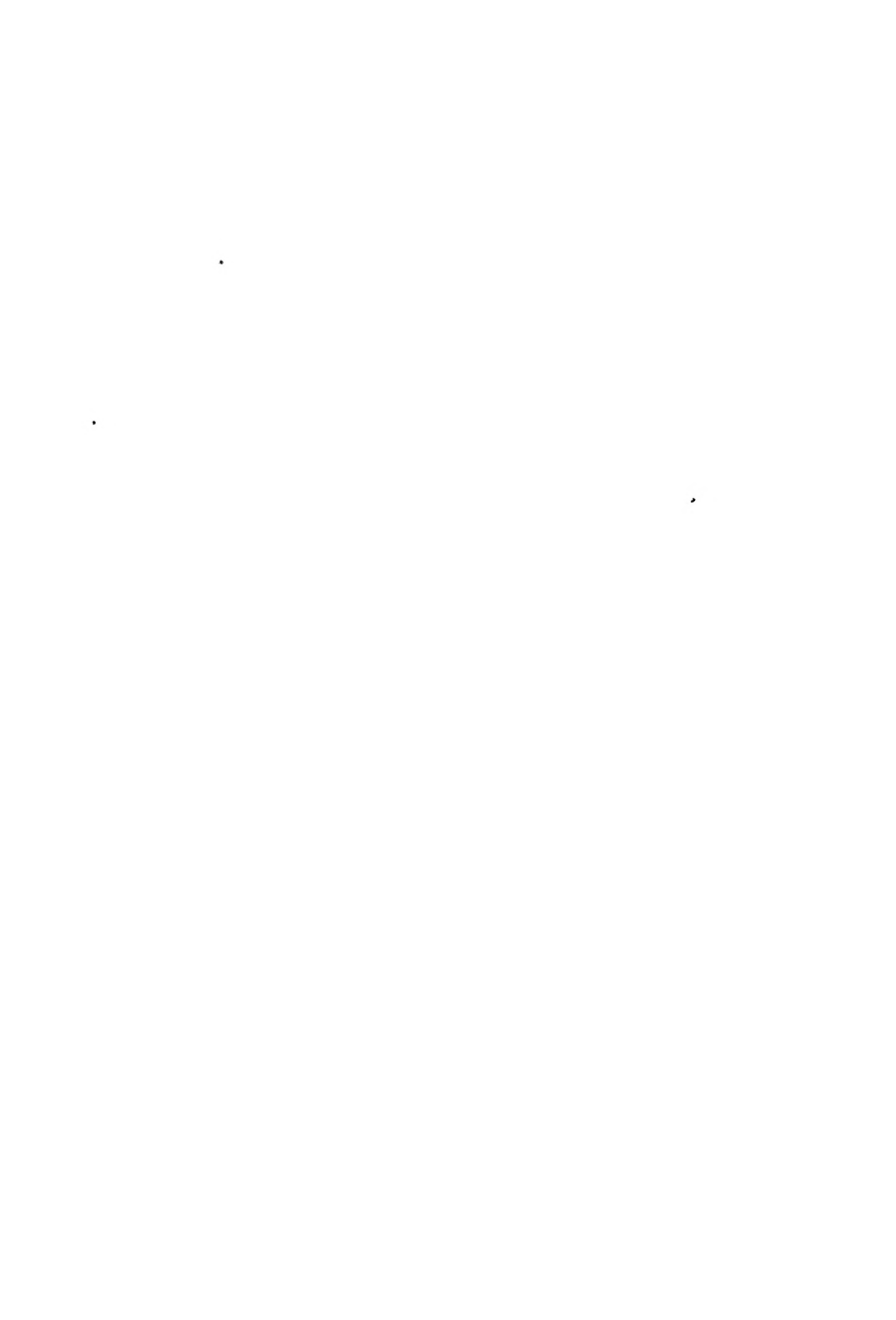
He had the sunniest of tempers. True, he would raise his stick when our merry band pressed too closely around him, but only with the same air with which he might have shown us his sceptre, had he had one. There was not one among us who would ever have been in the least disrespectful to him, for idiots are sacred in Brittany. Besides, in offending him, we might have deprived ourselves of one of our greatest treats—that of hearing him sing. He sang as sweetly as any nightingale, did this fantastic, witless wanderer, in his incongruous plumage. It was on the stone steps of the graveyard that he would seat himself when he came to Ploumilliau. There, taking off one of his sabots, he would rest it against his shoulder as though it had been a violin, and with his raised right hand play on the absent strings with an imaginary bow. No doubt at his call from the depths of that rough wood came a

music of silence, of which he only was conscious. He was no longer the same man. His slightly bent face was transfigured ; a passionate fervour lighted his eyes ; the rather foolish smile on his lips grew suddenly into something mysterious and haunting. Standing there before him, we enjoyed a silent share of his ecstasy, knowing that it was his usual prelude. At last, with the gentle murmur of flowing water, his voice, quite a young voice, fresh and pure as a fountain, would come flowing forth. I do not hesitate to say that no such voice now exists in Brittany. How I wish that Nonnik had been alive when Mons. Bourgault Ducoudray undertook the task of gathering together the Breton songs. I know that the master would have said he was the direct inheritor of one of those Armorican or Welsh harpists, who held so powerful a position in the Europe of the Middle Ages. He had the natural gift of song, and as for us, he held us spellbound.

It was not that he had a particularly large *répertoire*. Nonnik was ignorant of any world outside the neighbourhood of Plougaznou and Saint Jean-du-Doigt. This corner of the earth, the first he had seen, remained shining as the only light, the only familiar landmark, in the confused night of his intellect. Was not his fairy palace there, among the turreted rocks of the Château de Primel ? To make known the legends of that country was to him like singing the glory of his own family, and to it he devoted himself with all the fervour of a high priest. But his great triumph was a certain *wgers*, the Lament of Matélina Troadek. Into it he would put such pathos and melancholy, that positively he wounded our very souls.



THE BAY OF PRIMEEL



The event recorded by this lament occurred in the second half of the seventeenth century, during the lifetime of Locmaria, Lord of Guerrande, a friend of Madame de Sévigné. By his Breton vassals he was called "Markis Brûn," The Red Marquis, not so much from the colour of his hair, as because it was wise to keep clear of him, as from a wolf. Above all was he dangerous to women; their virtue had no worse enemy. Those who did not yield willingly to him he took by force. As soon as it was known that he was back on his estate, the alarm spread from neighbour to neighbour. "The beast is loose," they would say; "shut up your hens." Well, pretty Matélina Troadek was not shut up in time, for the ballad relates in covert language, that, "although only a simple peasant girl, she has given birth to the son of a marquis." A sad honour, alas! for which her parents forced her to pay dearly. They had no notion of working their arms off in order to feed the son of a rich man!

It was the season of the Fire Pardon; all the boats would soon be sailing westward to Saint Jean. Locmaria would be sure to go to this festival—the finest in all the country. "Well," said they, "Matélina shall go there herself, and take the opportunity of publicly presenting the marquis with his son." . . .

The ballad represents the poor young girl as refusing; praying, is not her shame enough without this scandal? And then, too, she is haunted by terrible fears—

"My father, my mother, if you love me,
You will not send me to the Pardon of Saint Jean!
A voice in my heart keeps telling me,
That if I go upon the sea, I shall be drowned!"

But neither father nor mother show any pity, and the poor child is forced to deck herself in her holiday attire. As she puts on each garment, her white dress, her yellow satin apron, she thinks that she is dressing herself in her winding-sheet ; and as she sets foot in the boat, she feels that it is to her death she is going.

“ Matélina Troadek said,
As the barque heeled over on one side,
‘ Tell your beads, every one of you,
While I say Vespers.’ ”

And the ballad goes on to tell us that she had scarcely finished the first verse when the catastrophe came. Just as she was disappearing, she remembered that Saint Maturin, her patron, was master of the wind and the water. To him, therefore, she recommended her child, praying the good saint to bear him safe and sound to land. And we are told that her prayer was answered, for that same evening a child, bound to a plank, was cast ashore on the beach of Traoun-Mériadek, a child—

“ Dressed in a gown of white satin
That showed him to be the son of a marquis.”

As to Matélina herself, when they found her body, she was lying eighteen fathoms deep beneath the water, with a branch of green seaweed in her hand.

“ Why a branch of green seaweed ? ” we always asked Nonnik.

“ As her palm of martyrdom,” he would answer, his eyes raised heavenward, as though beholding on high the pale, sweet phantom of the dead girl.

CHAPTER VI

WELL, these dangerous sea pilgrimages have all but ceased. They now exist only in two or three parishes, of which Locquéholé is one; one can form some idea of the great processions of former days from seeing its pilgrims set sail.

Through the wood we have passed downward to the end of the estuary, where the little port nestles beneath its green canopy. Locquéholé lies upon the Léon shore; but stern Léon dies here, giving place to the softness and langour of Trégor. The difference is as noticeable in the race as in the soil. One is immediately conscious of a gayer and more poetic nature.

The boats are just casting off as we arrive. Their many-coloured flags flutter in the breeze like a cloud of captive butterflies. The seats are crowded with girls and young men, and from end to end of each boat the fringes of shawls are hanging almost to the water. Merrily from boat to boat they call one to another—

“Take care, Anaïs, you will spoil your fringe!”

And laughter comes bubbling forth, to fly gaily away. There seems good reason for the proverb that speaks of the happy temper of the girls of Locquéholé. They go to the Pardon as though it were some merry-making made up of sea and love. Some of them try

merrily to help the rowers, the sails not being hoisted till they reach the open sea. As the last party goes on board, the man at the barrier calls to us—

“Are not you going too?”

And when we reply that we prefer to go by road—“So much the worse,” says he; “if you were to go with the young ladies of my parish, you would be doubly blessed.” And the young ladies call out in feigned displeasure, while jokes come raining down, and pretty shouts of laughter. Now, barque after barque, the little flotilla enters the veined region of the currents. Then suddenly there is a solemn silence; only the grinding of pulleys, the crackling of spreading sails. The fun is over, the real business of the crossing about to begin. In the centre of the bay crouches the rigid form of the stone of the Bull, spreading his black shadow over the glistening waters. There are as many sad memories connected with this rock as there are black cormorants perched upon it. The sight is a stern reminder, sufficient to sober the most thoughtless. Sailors begin to look to the sheets, and the girls, but a moment ago so full of nonsense, have nothing on their lips now, save canticles. The rhythm of their voices keeps time with the movement of the boats, and the sound spreads out behind them, widening with the eddy of their wake.

We have returned by the other bank to the heights of Kerséline, but still we hear the echo of their distant singing, answered from all the country round by the scattered tinkling of the Angelus, falling in a shower of clear, distinct sounds through the morning air. For a distance of three leagues there is not a church tower but feels called upon to celebrate the Pardon of Saint

Jean-du-Doigt, just as though it were its own feast. Thus was it that the carillons of former days rang out at the passing of the wonderful soldier. And what could be sweeter than this airy music, floating over the sun-bathed country? The pilgrims recognize each different chime, and understand its meaning. "This way!" says one. "Make haste!" exclaims another. "It is time the young men were at Saint Jean," mutters a third; and little by little, from the depths of the country, a heavy murmuring begins to arise, a sound of footsteps and prayers. There is a universal upheaval, and all the country begins to move in one direction, attracted as though by a magnet, Even we give way to the feeling, in spite of ourselves, and start in the great heat much earlier than we intended. It is not safe to breathe the contagion of these religious fevers.

The driver of our carriage is a man from Plouvorn, a Léonard, very respectable and prosaic. But the very idea that he is on his way to Traoun is enough to awaken within him a strange, artless feeling of tenderness.

"I have not seen Saint Jean since the year I drew my lot," says he, in Breton. "There were thirteen of us conscripts, who made a vow that we would go there barefoot if we drew a good number; and there were thirteen of us when we set out. We walked all night without speaking a single word, or even turning our heads. The floating meadow-mists went before us, as though to show us the way. I never felt so glad to be alive as during that night. No one was tired, for the earth and sky gave forth a sweet scent that refreshed our limbs like an unguent." . . .

And he half closed his eyes, that he might breathe once more the mystical odour of the night that was the one poem of his life. . . .

And now the rich verdure that festoons both sides of the valley of Morlaix is sinking away behind us, while opposite, toward the north, the long seaboard plains of Trégor stretch their sober lines. One last, deep chasm lies between us and them, the strangely silent, savage gorge of the Dourdû. The sea we scarcely thought to have seen again before reaching the coast, here makes a sudden and most unexpected reappearance. For this is indeed the sea, this beautiful clear green water that we cross, as it flows between banks flowery with broom, or bordered by alders, like some siren who has lost herself among the hills and dales. The descent into the apex of this funnel-like valley is so sudden, that it is not surprising it has been the cause of many fatal accidents, commemorated by crosses, here and there, as in a Street of Tombs, and by a marble slab built into a gable of the inn.

For there is an inn on the borders of this region, at whose door our carriage stops of its own accord. How many times have we not been there in this summer of 1898! It bears as its sign, "A la bonne Rencontre," and in future will be known as one of the spots sacred in the annals of Breton literature. There the Armorican drama was one day reborn; there in the old grey house, serving both as inn and village bakehouse, Thomas Park, commonly called Parkik, conceived the bold project of restoring our mystery plays, with all their ancient glory. There he gathered around him the first willing companions of his toilsome undertaking. There, during

the leisure hours of several winters, he fed them with his teaching and roused them by his enthusiasm, and from thence one day he will assuredly lead them forth to the conquest of souls. . . .

He had been expecting us all the morning, and ran out in his working clothes, face and hands white with flour. He had just finished a baking, and the hot loaves were steaming on the floor of beaten earth, while over them leant the peasant women, each trying to identify her own, by the special mark she had put upon it.

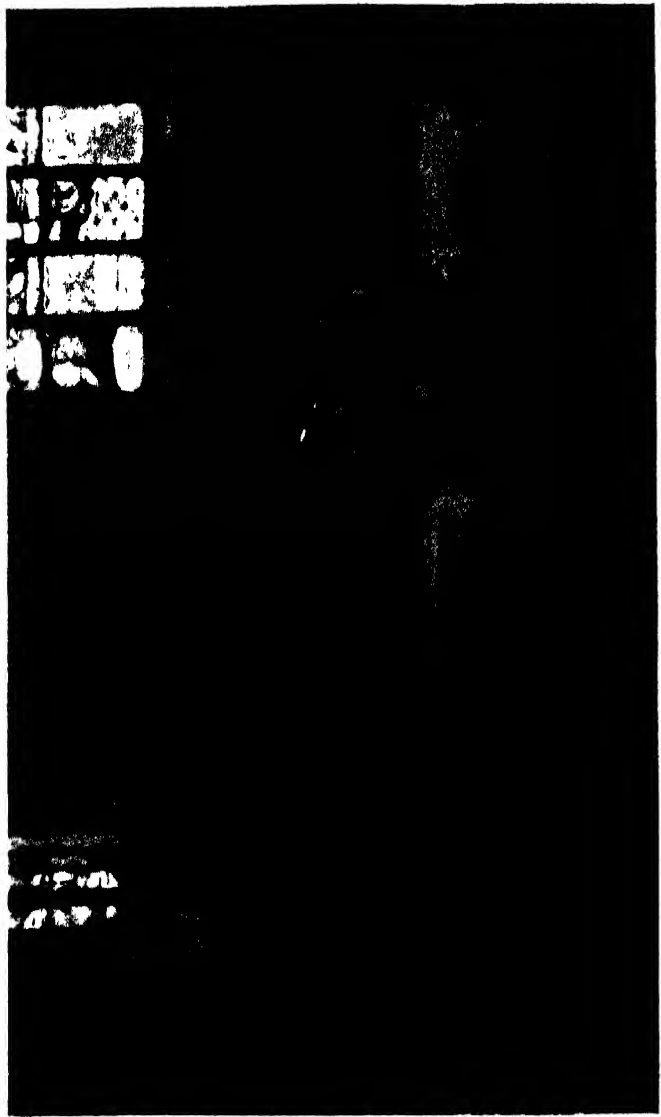
"I am afraid I am rather late in starting for Saint Jean," said Parkik. However, when we offered to take him with us in our carriage, he refused gently, glancing towards a very young girl, busy picking out her loaf; and added, with a hesitating, bashful manner—"You see, I am already engaged."

So evidently there is some secret understanding between them, is there? Well, if he does not confide in us, no doubt it is because he is waiting for the Pardon of Saint Jean to consecrate his betrothal, according to ancient custom. For, to make an engagement binding, the couple must have drunk together from the sacred fountains, and have put their "*Herbe d'Amour*" to the test of the Tantad. The nearer we approach Plougaznou, the more of these rustic couples do we come across, walking side by side, in the scanty shadow of the high banks, topped by great gilded boughs of gorse. As is usual under such circumstances, the man carries the girl's umbrella, point upward, while, in a dream, she walks along, smiling vaguely, with lowered eyelids. It would be vain to ask what they are talking about,

for there is no word audible. In Breton love language—"they speak in their hearts alone."

Indeed, the greater number of the pilgrims whom we overtake on the road, on foot or in *char-à-bancs*, are silent. The extreme heat of the day has no doubt something to do with this. Over the burning ground lies an atmosphere of fire, and even the dust of the road glitters like live coals. The black seed-pods of the broom burst with little fiery cracklings, and as we near the coast the country becomes quite bare, like a great naked steppe. Not a patch of green on which to rest the eyes, nothing to give relief from the glare. Here and there at rare intervals stands a thin group of pines, bearing at the end of their ruddy branches, plumes, unsubstantial as smoke, that seem ready to take wing and fly away. The golden tints of the moorland are all a-glitter, and brown pools shine like molten copper. It is a wild orgy of light. Very few houses in this district, only one or two old stone cottages, and mud hovels that add but another note to the universal burning, for it is the custom to repaint them in honour of the Tantad. All the preceding week, whitewashers' carts have been about the neighbourhood, and lime has flowed plentifully from brimming buckets. It has covered the walls, the chimneys, even the slates and thatching of the roofs, and the newly dressed cottages glitter hard and white.

Happily for the pilgrims there are ancient chapels here and there, offering delightful shade, damp and cool. All the rest of the year they lie closed like tombs, but during the pilgrimage season are left open night and day. Crypts they are in the half-light, the moss of ages creeping along their green walls, and water plants



ANCIENT CHAPTER, OFFERING DELIGHTFUL SHADE, DAMP AND COOL . . . THE MOSS
OF AGES CREEPING ALONG THEIR GREEN WALLS

trembling in the old stone *bénitiers*. We entered one of these chapels in passing. . . . It had been built on the ruins of a Templar's church, near the village of Kermouster. When at last our eyes grew accustomed to the faint light that fell from the loop-hole windows, we saw tall, half-naked men, with their trousers turned half up their legs, sleeping on the flag-stones, their heads pillowed on their folded vests. By their thin bony faces, their aquiline, bird-like noses, and the strange cap they wear, it is easy to recognize them as "Paganiz"—rude fisher-folk from Guissény or Aber-vrac'h, descendants of the old wreckers. They must have started yesterday, these men, and have travelled all night, guided by the stars, from the farthest bounds of Léon. But indeed, to these beach-wanderers, such a journey is mere child's play. Besides, what would they not go through for the sake of Saint Jean! They will tell you that their fathers used to pray after this manner—

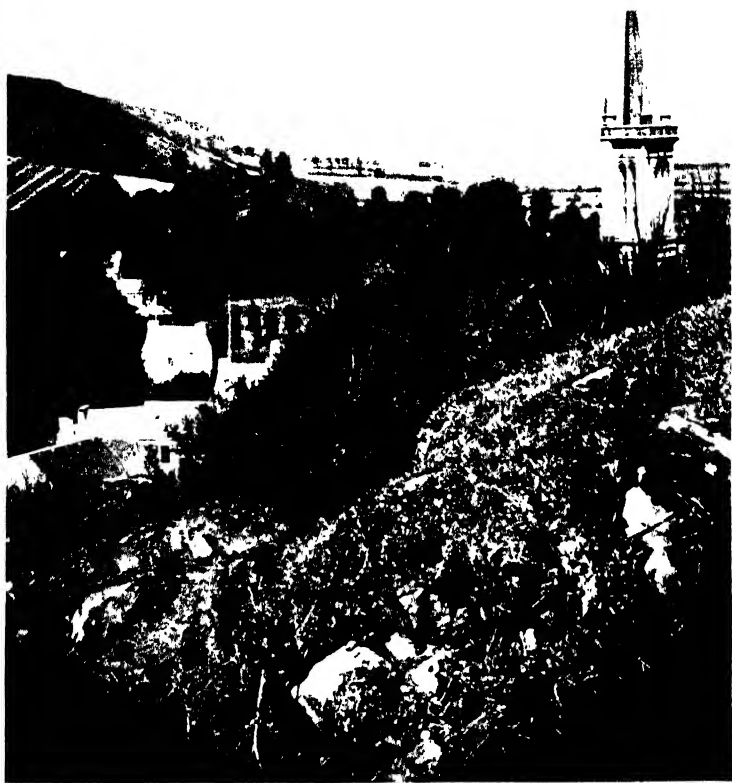
"Jean of Plougaznou, by the power of thy finger sharpen our eyes. Give us the sight of cormorants, to watch through the shadows of sea and night, so that from afar we may notice the coming of a wreck, and from further still the approach of the 'Maltôtier.'"

CHAPTER VII

A CROSS-ROAD, where the routes break away from each other, one proceeding straight to Plougaznou, whose little town and clock-tower stand out against the sky on the top of a great bare ridge, behind which might lie the end of all things, the yawning gulf of immensity.

As to the other road, no one can doubt for a moment as to its destination. At its point of starting is a calvary, serving also the purpose of a sign-post. To the upright of this cross has been nailed an arm taken from some worn-out crucifix, and its meaning is so unmistakable that the blind themselves can read it as plainly as those who can see.

There are legions of the blind at this *fête* of Light. Many come to make money by the exhibition of their sightless eyes, and possibly, some among them are not so hopelessly afflicted as they seem. Begging, which for so many ages was a kind of priesthood in Brittany, is gradually becoming a trade, and is not without its rogues. But, besides these people, there are numbers who are drawn thither by the wonderful curative reputation of the Tantad. Why should not the sacred fire once again work the miracle it has so often performed in the past? Such is the thought read on more than one eager face, whose eyes are pathetically closed. Some are crying aloud with a strange intense fervour, like this



SAINT JEAN-DU-DOIGT

Master Sabotier from the Bois de la Nuit, whom we come across just as prudence and the quaintness of the scene force us to quit our carriage, and, on foot among the crowd, make our way down the exquisite wild slope to Traoun-Mériadek.

Strong and tall as the beech trees of his native forest, the old man walks with an impatient, jerky stride, leaning one hand on the shoulder of a young girl, above whom he towers by more than a head. The sight of them calls up classic memories. Is it not a Breton Œdipus, led by some rustic Antigone? Now and again they exchange a brief word or two, always the same.

Œdipus asks, in an eager voice—

“Do you begin to see it?”

And Antigone, shading her eyes with her hand, makes answer—

“No, father, not yet!”

Suddenly she stops, and exclaims—

“Ah, there it is!”

“It” is the gilt cock on the summit of the spire of Saint Jean, that has just made its appearance, shining in the sun between two waves of verdure in the bend of the valley. The blind man has gone down upon his knees with so sudden a movement that for a moment we think he has fallen. Laying his open palms flat on the dusty road, he cries—

“Land of Saint Jean, I embrace thee. . . . My eyes! give me back my eyes! Send me not away again without having beheld thee!”

I hear some one murmuring, “Ah, I have seen him before. He came last year. . . . It is the man who was blinded by lightning.” . . .

Aye, and he will come again next year, and every year, so long as he has strength to make the journey. His legs will give way sooner than his patience. Like all his fatalistic race, his resignation is founded on infinite hope. . . . And think of the marvellous picture which he and his fellows must bear in their hearts of this "Land of Saint Jean," this realm of Fire and Light, toward which they are led by all the passion of their desire. There, indeed, she lies, spreading her semicircle of charms at our feet; after the broad, hot plains through which we have come, what an oasis! how fresh, how smiling, how restful! A horseshoe of rocky hills, ending in promontories, encircles a deep valley, exquisitely wooded. All the greens mingle their tints together, from the lightest and most ethereal to the richest and darkest. In the distance appears the sea, lying high up against the sky, from which it would be indistinguishable, save for the sparkle of its blue waters.

Between the two points of Plougaznou and Guimaëc the valley lies as though in an immense goblet, wrought with marvellous skill, and encrusted with jems, the amethyst of the heath, the topaz of the gorse. . . .

One of the special charms of Traoun-Mériadek is this union of sylvan grace with ocean splendour. But still more striking, especially on the burning threshold of summer, is the lavish abundance of living water. You feel it in the very air long before you see it. The springs are bubbling everywhere, falling in pearly drops, flowing in silent streams. It seems only necessary to press the ground with the foot to bring the water flowing from every pore. Ah, indeed, we are here in the region of



THE FOUNTAIN OF SAINT JEAN

the Naiads, and we pass along bathed, enfolded by their damp, cool breath. At every step a spring arises, here drowsing motionless beneath a coverlet of duckweed, there feeding a tufted cress-bed, in the midst of which an ancient Gallo-Roman cross moulders away. Here again is one that, escaping slyly from the runnel by the roadside, meanders over the path, wearing and destroying it, to the despair of the roadmaker. A fourth . . . but it would be a mere absurdity to attempt to describe them all. There is a local saying that declares there are more fountains at Saint Jean-du-Doigt than souls in paradise !

Once upon a time all these Naiads had their temples, each little fountain its shrine of sculptured stone, and still there are remains of some of them. One especially is very beautiful. This fountain rises in the churchyard, and for this reason no doubt is held in especial honour. So a monument worthy of its particular sanctity has been erected over it, and it is no small surprise to the traveller to find one of the most exquisite specimens of Renaissance art hidden away in this little village graveyard in the depths of a forgotten valley. The unknown sculptor, who could bring this graceful, living metal flower from out its rough bronze covering, must have been a master of his art. Three cups rise one above another holding the water, that is ever overflowing and falling. In the neighbourhood it is called Feunteun-Ar-Bis, the Fountain of the Finger, or sometimes, The Mother Fountain, A Vamm-Vommen. An old pilgrim to whom I talked on the way down told me the following legend about it :—

“When the young soldier, still bearing the relic

beneath his skin, found himself in his native parish, he hastened to wash at this fountain, so that he might rid his face and hands of the Norman dust before assisting at the Mass. No sooner, however, had he plunged his arms in the basin than the water began to boil, as though heated by a great fire. It was the power of the Holy Finger passing through it! Ever since then it has been blessed ; but to make assurance doubly sure, every year, after the Tantad, the clergy place the relic in the fountain, and they say that the water steams as though a red-hot iron touched it! But its healing property is really everlasting ; no sickness is there which it will not cure, and so every one begins and ends the Pardon at the fountain. Look what a crowd there is already around the basin ! ”

The village is still half hidden by trees ; but through a gap we can see a corner of the churchyard, and the glitter of falling water sparkles above a swarm of human beings, who are only to be distinguished from one another by their white caps, black hats, and numberless arms stretched out in invocation. . . . The damp scent of moss grows stronger, more penetrating, mingled with a faint, intoxicating perfume of gorse, while now and then a puff of sea-breeze tells of the adjacent shore.

And then, too, there are other scents less romantic given off from the outdoor kitchens ; for in the little meadows that border the road at the foot of the slope, the innkeepers from Morlaix and Lanmeur have built primitive hearths from the round stones of the beach, and are kneading dough, peeling potatoes, tossing crêpes, roasting sausages. . . . Bundles of wood hold up the saucepans, and one old witch, with smoke-dried features,

crouching beside a pot she is stirring, cries to us as we pass, "Coffee, my good people, excellent coffee! Only two sous a cup!"

Then, following the bivouac fires, come booths, a whole street of them, where, beneath sunburnt awnings, glass beads and sparkling tinsel glitter. Of the actual village houses there is no trace. Beyond all the finery, however, rises a porch, a magnificent triumphal arch, stately, solitary as a ruin, the last grand vestige, it is said, of some forgotten civilization. Statues are decaying in its niches, and between the disjointed stones grow the vigorous creeping plants that love such old walls; while two beggars, dilapidated and ragged as the stonework against which they lean, look like prophets lamenting over fallen Nineveh. As a matter of fact, they are singing the praises of Sant Iann Badézour, for this is the entrance to the churchyard, and here we are at Saint Jean!

CHAPTER VIII

NOW, though the little mystic town seems hidden away well enough in its circle of hills and its thick covering of foliage, there will come ever and anon some traveller in search of the unknown—some tourist looking for cheap odds-and-ends. So there is an inn adorned by the name of a hotel, one of the pleasantest conceivable! And the most delightful thing about it, especially on the day of the Pardon, is its position, exactly opposite the church, to which it really forms a kind of secular outbuilding. Besides this, it has the loveliest views, both up the valley and down towards the sea. From my room, on the first floor, I can look straight through the arch and the porch into the blue dusk of the nave, a-glitter with lighted candles; can watch the movements of the pilgrims in the graveyard as they press toward the sacred fountain; can follow the soft curves of the meadows around the village, right away to the rocky headland that shelters Saint Jean from the west.

A mountain path leads up to this steep cliff, winding in and out among dwarf oaks, tufts of purple heather, and sumptuous, flaming banks of gorse.

"Down there," says my hostess; "down there the procession from Plougaznou will come, with the first sound of the vesper bell. You will find it something well worth looking at."



Twilight.

AN INN, ADORNED WITH THE NAME OF AN HOTEL.

Just then the bells did break out, and as though it had only been waiting for the signal, a great scarlet banner, spangled with gold, rose little by little away on the height, then all at once filled, like the purple sail of some fabled galley. Behind, rose a second, a third, and still others, their violet velvet or plush, their emerald brocade, moving in time to the marching. When the procession began to descend the sunny slope, the effect of all these banners, drawn up into a marvellous scale of colours, was really very curious, enriched as it was by the glory of the sunshine. Young white-robed girls, maidens of Trégor, in delicate starched caps, fine and transparent, crowded round the foot of each staff, closely following the bearer, holding—I might say clutching—the cords, for at the more exposed points of the descent they were almost obliged to hang on to keep the heavy banner upright, and allow the bearer to recover his threatened equilibrium. They made me think of a certain fairy ship, about which I have heard some old sea-song, whose rigging was composed of silver cords, and the crew of young girls.

And now the watchers, posted in the galleries of the high clock-tower, come running, crying excitedly—
“Plougaznou! Plougaznou!”

A movement can be seen among the crowd in the church. It is the procession of Saint Jean making its way out, with unfurled banners. Custom has long settled that the two processions should meet at the boundary between the two parishes. The precise spot is an old bridge of scattered boulders at the end of the village, just where the river forms a natural boundary. From each side the crosses approach, bowing to one

another, giving the kiss of peace. Then the banners follow the example of the crosses, bending one towards another, so that the sparkling representations of the saints upon them touch. When the turn comes for the great banner of Saint Jean to make its reverence, there is a sudden movement of curiosity and anxiety among the crowd, for this huge piece of embroidery is by no means easy to manipulate, masterpiece that it is of generations of workers in gold thread. It represents the Baptism of Our Saviour, and is celebrated all over Brittany, not only on account of its beauty, but for its weight. It is therefore reckoned as a species of Palladium. Its cross beam is as large as a yard, and its pole thick as a mast. None but the very strongest can ever hope to bear it, and no honour is more coveted throughout all this portion of Trégor. In past ages it was eagerly competed for, not a commune or hamlet but sent its champion; for the victor was as renowned as the winner of the Olympian games among the Greeks. He became the pride of his fellow-countrymen; they spoke of him as more than mortal, as a hero, and the poets of the countryside made songs in his praise.

To-day, outsiders have ceased to take part in the sacred sport; but the young men of Saint Jean still compete, as did their fathers. For four or five months before the Pardon they gather every Sunday on the threshing-floor of some farm to practise the "*Épreuve de la Perche!*" This pole is very long, shod with iron at its thicker end, and its weight is equal to that of the banner. The trial consists in raising it from the ground by its thin end, holding it straight aloft, and then walking a certain number of times round the yard, over the

damp mess and dry brushwood with which the ground is covered. It is not uncommon for people to rupture some internal organ at these exercises.

"You see," remarked a man, against whom I was squeezed; "you see, there is always the fear of a man being killed on this bridge when the great banner is lowered. . . . One year I saw the bearer struck stiff; he broke a blood-vessel in his chest. There was not even time for the rector to give him the sacrament. But he had the funeral of a prince, and on his grave-stone——"

A great murmur of admiration drowned the voice of my companion. Eyes shone, faces brightened, people dug with their elbows, and interjections passed from lip to lip. "Ha! that little Landouar, what a way he has!" . . . "That's what I call a bow! Not a wrinkle on his face!" . . . "Nor a tremble of the pole!" . . .

The hymn that is being sung, and the clashing of the bells, no doubt prevent these flattering remarks from reaching the ears of "that little Landouar." But in any case he would not hear them. He is entirely engrossed by his work, his mind tense as his muscles, his fingers bent and stiff like yellow gorse-roots, his bull neck half sunk between his sinewy, thick-set shoulders, his gaze fixed, hypnotized by the great piece of floating silk that spreads above him like a glory, and for one never-to-be-forgotten moment makes him positively drunk with triumph.

But he is not at the end of his task. Behind, by the arch of the graveyard, other processions are awaiting the kiss of peace. Here come the men of Garlan, Lanmeur, Loquirec. All the parishes between the Morlaix river and the Pointe d'Armorique have sent

their priests and crosses, their brightest banners, and most bedizened *Suisses*.

It is an indescribable swarm of butterflies, a debauch, a frenzy of colour. Ah! how far away it seems, that everyday Brittany we all know so well, the dead grey Brittany of the verse-makers and writers! Here everything is glittering, resplendent, flaming. The fiery breath seems to have melted sky and ocean into one, and even the air gives forth a warm, quickening breath. The scent of grass and fountains, who shall describe! Truly a God-like prodigality pervades all things, and one can but be conscious every moment of the mysterious, fertilizing, life-giving powers of Nature. And now the moment is approaching when the great Sun, before commencing his descent, casts all the vehemence of his broad rays on the hillside that has ever been devoted to his worship.

It rises, this hill, on the east of the village; indeed, the last houses clamber up its sides. A road between two high banks leads straight up to it, and the *talus* are topped by oaks, many a century old, whose deformed branches give them a resemblance to a band of monstrous beggars. The ground is worn away underfoot as though it were the dry bed of a torrent, and in fact a torrent of men and women *is* streaming up it, toward the height. They press forward, they shoulder each other; each wishes to be the first to reach the Tanttad. Halfway up I came across the blind man of the Bois de la Nuit, but his daughter is no longer leading him; it is he who is dragging her forward. He climbs upward, with his strange, sleep-walker's gait, flinging himself against people, stumbling over stones, his grand

pathetic head rising above the human stream like that of some wild, sightless Titan.

"There, there, cousin," said I, in the speech of his district, and using the form of address the sabotier loves; "why are you in such a hurry? Do you know that your poor daughter is quite worn out?"

"Oh, she can rest when she gets to the top," said he. "I *must* get a good place at the Tantad!"

And then, in his pathetic voice, he added, "It was my own fault I was not cured last year; I ought to have gone nearer to the fire. This time I must be able to touch it, to feel its heat in the very depths of my eyeballs!"

And excited at the expectation, or rather at the certainty of the coming miracle, he hurled himself still more violently against the sacred hillside, longing to reach that summit, that Breton Horeb, so soon to be crowned by its flaming Bush!

CHAPTER IX

THREE tracks meet at the summit, forming one of those triangular spots, which, like the pagan Trivia, pass for holy ground in Brittany! The remains of old paving show that one of the many Roman roads leading from Carhaix to the sea branched off at this point. Latin and Gaulish divinities must have fraternized on these heights, and much of their spirit still lingers in the light, the air, the smile of the waves, the fields of flowering black corn, and tall, shivering rye. Christianity has only multiplied the symbols, she has never been able to destroy the worship. Thus the calvary, that has been planted in the centre of the space, has stones at its base that have been taken from the ancient road, stones that were quarried by Roman soldiers. And beside it lies the old basin of a fountain. Yes, of another fountain, where the original *divonne* still officiates over extremely unorthodox ceremonies, under the placid eyes of a much-begarlanded figure of Saint John. But the most extraordinary survival of the old human cult is the pyramid of the Tântad itself! It rises in an enormous stack, like the pyre of some Homeric chief, dominating the whole countryside, and quite overwhelming the calvary with its shadow. Every "Fire" in the commune has contributed its branch of gorse towards the great pile. All day yesterday men

stacked and built it, and in the evening the women arrived to perfect the work. They came in a band, to hang it with ribbons and green wreaths, to dress it with roses and poppies, lending an air of smiling beauty to its heavy, prickly form. And then, when all was finished, they hung across the valley the rope that from time immemorial has united the Tantad with the church steeple. If you inquire as to the use of this rope, the natives will give you the somewhat Sibylline answer—"It is the way by which the Dragon comes."

At the time when Cambry wrote, Saint Jean, like those other places devoted to the *fête* of the solstice, did not light its Tantad till after nightfall. In fact, the ceremony was postponed till it was perfectly dark. Then suddenly, at the call of the *Veni Creator*, sung by the priests, an archangel, glittering with flames and fire-works, pierced the shadows, flew straight to the pile, lit it, and after having fanned it with his wide-spread wings, vanished into the darkness. Of course, there were many who were not deceived by the performance, but the strangeness of the night scene left a distinct impression on the most sceptical mind. Besides, think of the many pilgrims there were in Brittany in the eighteenth century who knew nothing whatever of fire-works ! Think of the astonishment and fright of these poor souls, the greater number of whom were as ignorant as the Russian Moujik, who sees the Holy Ghost come down in a shower of burning tow on Easter Day. They had no idea that they were assisting at a religious show ; to them it was a miraculous phenomenon. And of course they were more likely to believe in the supernatural origin of the angel when the darkness

prevented them seeing the means by which he was brought to them. What frantic dances there were around the Tantad! and afterward, what mad homegoings under the warm June sky, glittering with stars! Many people never went home at all, but ran about the shore or the country all night, pursuing each other with wild cries of "Iou! Iou!" and flaming brands!

I fancy it must have been in order to put an end to these very disorderly disturbances, in which the very women themselves took pleasure, that the authorities decided to hold the Tantad in daylight, immediately after Vespers. And this soon resulted in the suppression of the angel. He no longer had any excuse. The manner of his appearance became nothing but a vulgar trick, liable to make people laugh, for even the most ignorant could not fail to notice the strings that worked him. So they hid him away in some loft, and substituted a large rocket, and it is this that the people call the Dragon.

"If you are looking for a place to stand, the best are on this side," says a well-known voice behind me, and there are Parkik and his sweetheart. They have come straight to the Tantad; in fact, I am afraid they have come for that only. And it is the same with large numbers of the pilgrims, for there are crowds who have hastened to the hill without ever going to Vespers at all. It is not only the road that is full of people, the banks on either side, the fields themselves, are darkening, furrow after furrow, before the growing flood of heavy black hats, relieved by the women's caps, delicate as foam. The neighbouring farmers are trying vainly to protect their crops.

"Spare the corn, at all events!" cries one lamentable voice.

"Bah! Saint John will soon make all that up to you," comes the retort.

And you must remember that as a rule these wild corn-tramplers hold it a sacrilege to tread on one ear. "Be respectful towards the corn that makes thy bread; treat it as though it were thy mother!" says a Breton proverb. But who pays any attention to proverbs on the day of the Tantad? . . .

"Besides," says Parkik, "these peasants are not really as troubled as they seem. They were not born this morning. When they sowed in the autumn, they must have known that the corn would not be ripe by now. Therefore, as they did sow, they must have done it to please themselves. . . . There are certain losses that turn out to be gains. Barley, wheat, rye, that is all Lôd an Tân, an offering to the Fire, and they know well enough that what is offered to the fire, the fire pays back a hundred-fold!"

"Then I suppose you mean that these farmers would be still more aggrieved if the Tantad worshippers gave them no reason for complaint?"

"Just so, and the proof is in the fact that they are among the most prosperous farmers in the whole district."

It is evident, however, that some of them are not trusting to the fire to repay them, for we have no sooner hoisted ourselves up on to the terrace, that forms a barrier to a field of oats, than we become aware of an altercation between a disagreeable-looking woman and some pilgrims, who have already taken their stand.

"I tell you that these places are a sou each!" she cries.

"Just as if it was a church," says some one, in a bantering voice.

"Quite so! And if you find it too dear, you can go somewhere else."

"Never! The sight of the Tantad is free to every one."

"Yes; but my field is my own, I think."

"Oh, we shall not run off with it; don't fret yourself!"

But in the end, with a final fling, every one handed over his sou.

"I hope the money will stick to your hand!" said one.

"May the flames of the Tantad burn you for ever!" exclaimed another.

I glanced at Parkik. He shook his head, and sighed deeply, looking very shocked.

"Ah, these new ways!" said he. "The people have caught the money-fever from the visitors who come in the season. And now this greedy woman is trading on her bit of land being better situated than other people's."

And in truth, we are splendidly placed for seeing everything. Only a few yards separate us from the Tantad, and beyond the dense, living waves that surge at its base, we can watch the wide panorama of Traoun-Mériadek, with its boundary of sea, that rich diadem of water that encloses it from the rocks of Primel, to the solitary shores of Crec'h-Meur. At our feet lies the road, which in a few moments will be filled with all the



THE GREAT BANNER OF SAINT JEAN. APPROACHING THE BONFIRE.

pomp of the procession. It descends toward the little town by a gentle slope that winds along the base of the hillside. Rows of ash trees, ranks of graceful, delicate poplars border it, and make it into a green avenue, shady and pleasant; and along this road, at almost every step, the noise of falling water sounds on the mossy margin of some pool. The numberless eyes of the crowd are fixed, now on the sun, now on the steeple of Saint Jean. A breeze of impatience sweeps over the sea of heads in long, long waves, and the voices gather into a murmuring ocean-swell. Even Parkik's timid *fiancée* catches something of the prevailing excitement, crushing between her fingers the little bouquet of "Fire Flowers" she has just bought from some poor seller.

All at once there is a cry—a loud cry—springing from a thousand lips—

"The rocket!"

They point to the sky just above the church. I have barely time to see a gleam and a little cloud of falling ash. But the heart of the multitude is quivering with a great joy. Down below, the bells have begun ringing anew, and the whole valley is echoing like a great copper boiler. Now the banners are appearing. For a moment they flutter in the graveyard, then begin to mount the holy path. One by one we see them glistening, slow and majestic, like glorious phantoms, beneath the trees. The last is still in the depths of the valley when the first has emerged on the height. As each cross rises, shedding its gold or silver glory out among the glimmering silk and velvet, a chorus greets it by the name of the parish from which it has come. The procession moves to the sound of singing,

and guns are fired, giving the scene an air of Eastern romance. And then something comes along that calls up a vivid picture of the ancient cult: a choir of young girls appear, preceded by a white ram, led by a child dressed in goatskins. The girls hold the creature by many-coloured strands fastened to its neck: its coat has been carefully washed and combed, and from its horns hang tufts of ribbon. As for the child who leads it, he walks along quite gravely, with the air of a young sacrificial priest. And, indeed, it is no small distinction for him to have been chosen as the leader of the "Blessed Lamb;" many of his companions would have liked the honour, boys who, like himself, fulfilled the two conditions required—not to have passed the age of innocence, and to have been entered in the baptismal register under the name of John.

The police have opened a path through the crowd, and have cleared a space immediately around the Tantad. An old drummer, who looks as though he had come out of one of Raffet's engravings, beats with his withered hands on a grotesque old drum. The National Guard—nothing comes to an end in Brittany—form a line, armed with enormous flint-lock blunderbusses, that were, no doubt, used in the Chouanne war; and then the various processions begin their march around the Tantad. While one banner passes along after another, and the cured of yesterday follow those who are to be healed to-morrow in an endless line, some telling their beads, and some brandishing wax candles, peasants near the fountain are fastening fireworks to posts, of which I have never been able to understand the use.

"Surely they are not going to let them off now?" I ask Parkik.

"Yes," says he; "it is the usual beginning of the Tantad."

It is impossible to realize the imaginative faculty of the Breton race without having seen one of these festivals, which sometimes are so irresistibly funny. I shall never forget the delighted shiver that ran through the childish crowd, as each rocket went whistling up into the air. It scarcely streaked the sky with its pale fire, and died out instead of breaking into a shower of stars. But the dear souls were none the less fascinated; and, no doubt, where my eyes saw only a pale fleck of grey smoke, theirs gazed upon a magic constellation, for they saw in the heavens the mirage of their own dreams. Ah, and what ecstasy for the school children! What shouts of excitement every time that the burning stick threatened to fall on some one. . . .

When I asked whether no accident ever happened, a neighbour said—

"For as far back as I remember, there has only been one, and that no doubt was allowed by Saint John."

"Really?"

"Yes! A shopkeeper of the town, a bad man, came just on purpose to swagger about and show himself off. 'How idiotic these people are,' said he, 'to let off fireworks at five o'clock in the afternoon of a bright June day, with the sun still shining.' He had scarcely spoken when the stick of a rocket put out his eye, and his mocking speech ended in a foolish bellowing. It was a

rough punishment, certainly. But there! the fire is like the earth itself, too old to allow any one to treat it with disrespect."

A comparative quiet has succeeded the excitement. The priests have taken their stand on the foot of the calvary, and the banners for the most part have been put away in the shelter of one of the farm courts. Only the great banner of Saint Jean remains, face to face with the Tantad. At a sign from the rector, Landouar, the little athlete, with gnarled body and stiffened muscles, raises and inclines it three times.

"That is the signal," whispers Parkik, as though he were speaking in church.

The crowd itself is silent, every eye directed towards the church tower, where tiny human forms can be seen hurrying about in the last excitement of preparation. Four or five solemn minutes pass thus, and faces are strained, eager, almost anxious. Then the rope trembles, and to the sound of firing, the Dragon shoots forth, hesitates. . . . The wishes that are made during his passage through the air are sure to be fulfilled, if only he makes the transit without a break. For it sometimes happens that he stops short in distress, or even goes back again. Those versed in his ways will tell you that he has his tempers and his moods. For instance, look at him now; he is making as though he would stop, and already disappointed mouths are saying—

"I never have any luck! Oh, well, it is all over!"

But no, that was a false alarm. All the wishes will be fulfilled. He has triumphantly finished his airy course, and planted his sting in the flank of the pile. . . . A slight crackling, a few puffs of smoke, and



'AN TAN' AN TAN!'"

with a quick bound the flame springs up, mounts, spreads. . . .

"An Tân! An Tân!" * . . .

And the cry mounts also, growing at sight of the flame ; that cry hallowed by numberless solar festivals ; that cry that rose from the very depths of the soul of the ancients, and is now heard on the lips of these their far-away sons. Even thus was it that Celts of old glorified the great spirit of Life and Light, as they gathered around the tribal fires on the slopes of the Himalayas. Since then the race has lived through thousands of years, and traversed vast tracts of country. During the centuries it has left traces of its religion in many lands ; and here, on this hill crest to-day, can be heard the echo of the great bygone voices still reverberating in the depths of these Breton souls on the shore of the Western ocean.

"An Tân! An Tân!"

The sight is indescribably barbarous and beautiful. Supple and snakelike, the flame soon enfolds the pyramid in its glowing rings. Within the strong embrace the pile seems to awaken, to shake off its torpor, to come to life. A monstrous energy takes possession of its hitherto motionless form. The sharp kiss of the fire burrows into it, excavating and carving it, till little by little from the formless block, a giant shape, a black Moloch, crowned with burning cloud and robed in flaming purple, seems to grow !

"An Tân! An Tân!"

The glow of the god has become so intense, that it is scarcely possible to bear either the heat or the brilliance.

"The Fire! The Fire!"

The priests have fled. Even the crowd has drawn back. Only the blind man of the Bois de la Nuit, bareheaded, and holding his rosary between his fingers, stands obstinately facing the furnace, gazing upon it with all the despairing tragedy of his sightless eyes. A noise as of great organ-pipes, a storm of rushing sounds, swells and escapes in blasts of wind from the crimson depths of the Tantad. Then all at once there is a still louder roar, followed by a long-drawn sigh. It is the final flare before the sudden end.

“An Tân! An Tân!”

This time the invocation has all the melancholy sweetness of a farewell. Slowly, with the rustling of falling silk, the burning brands sink down, while overhead the flames rise, mount, and vanish into the heavens. . . . The sabotier's daughter goes up to where her father is still standing, and taking hold of his sleeve says sadly—

“It is finished!”

THE PARDON OF FIRE

CHAPTER X

I CAME down from the holy mount just as the sun's rays, half hidden by the western heights, began themselves to fail. By way of change I took the route the procession had followed, where the delicate foliage of ash and poplar made lace-work on the mauve-coloured shadows. Seated on the margins of the fountains, old women with bowls in their hands praised the virtues of each spring to the Tantad pilgrims.

"You who have been to the Fire," they cried, "come to the Water also!"

And thus, all along the winding road, I made my way, to the sound of a murmuring litany like unto the humming of bees round a hive. A great calm had sunk down from the cooling sky, and the declining light had a weary content about it, though passionate still, and all too glittering. The faces of the people, too, though more at ease, preserved something of their late exaltation. They walked quietly and silently, but the excitement showed in the brilliancy of their eyes.

Every one carried away some remembrance of the fire. Some had scorched the pilgrim staffs they had cut that morning on arriving at the land of Saint Jean; others, quicker, or more active, had replaced them by branches of charred gorse. Young girls held bouquets whose flowers had been burned by the flame, and every

now and then a group would break off and move away in the direction of its village, calling out, by way of farewell, the sacred wish—

“Yéc'hed ha joa a-beurz Sant Yann vinniget !” *

In the graveyard, the wild horde of beggars and cripples, who mount guard day and night, were making their beds between the tombs, on the stone benches of the porch, even under the vaulting of the bone-house, where once the lantern of the dead used to burn. As I passed the church, I glanced in. Before a pillar, surrounded by a triple band of candles, a priest was presenting the relics of Saint Mériadek and Saint Maudez to be kissed by the faithful. Another, permanently ensconced within the altar rails, was touching eyes with the end of the little silver-gilt case that contains the finger of the Forerunner. And finally, near a sort of zinc cistern, fitted into one of the low arches of the wall, women were bathing their eyelids and lips with their handkerchiefs, which they soaked and re-soaked in the marvellous water. It is “Dour ar Bis” (Water of the Finger), as a Breton inscription placed over one of the taps informs me. . . . Well, I have left all these good folk to their practices, and with no other company than the clear singing of the brook of Traoun-Mériadek, more silvery than ever in the evening stillness, I have wandered down to the sea-beach.

Paths bordered by privet, hawthorn, and elder lead thither, passing ancient farms, dismantled manors, built “during the lifetime of Queen Anne, when Saint Jean was inhabited only by gentlemen.” But further on, at the extreme verge, is a desert, an infinite solitude.

* “Joy and good health from the blessed Saint John !”

When I reached the shore, the tide was low, and the promontories lay like a fleet of huge, motionless ships against the deep splendour of the setting sun. And behind their shadowy hulls, down there in the distant horizon, towards which they seemed but awaiting a signal to set sail, another Tantad finished dying, the marvellous fairy Tantad that every eventide exhibits the unapproachable magic of the sun.

BOOK IV.—SAINT RONAN
THE PARDON OF THE MOUNTAIN

DEDICATED TO JOSÉ-MARIA DE HEREDIA

CHAPTER I

WHO does not remember those charming pages of "Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse," which the author has devoted, with such good-humoured raillery, to that amusing saint, *Ronan*, forerunner in Armorican Brittany of the clan of *Renan*!

"Among all Breton saints, never has there been one more entirely original. His story has been told me several times, and on every occasion the circumstances were more and more extraordinary. He lived in Cornouailles, near the little town that bears his name. He was an earth spirit rather than a saint! Over the elements his powers were appalling, while in character he was violent and rather capricious. It was impossible to foretell what he was going to do, or what he wished. People respected him, but his obstinate determination to live alone, and go his own way, inspired them with awe. So much so indeed, that on the day



THE GRAND TROMENIE OF 1905, AT LOCKONAN

when he was found lying dead on the floor of his cell the terror in the neighbourhood was general. The first person who, happening to look in at the open window, saw him stretched out on the ground, ran away as fast as his legs would carry him.

"All his life this Ronan had been so self-willed and exacting that no one dared even guess what he would wish to have done with his body. If a mistake were made, there would as likely as not be an outbreak of plague, a town swallowed up, an entire district changed into a swamp, or some other of those visitations by means of which he had been accustomed to avenge himself during life. To take him to the church seemed the last thing likely to suit him ; he always appeared to have a special aversion to it, and moreover he was quite capable of resisting, of making a scandal.

"All the chiefs assembled together in the cell around the great dark body lying on the ground ; and at last one of them gave this sage advice—

"'During his life we were never able to understand him ; it would have been easier to foretell the flight of the swallow through the heavens than to follow the course of his thoughts ; now he is dead he had better still have his way. Let us cut down some trees and make a cart. To it we will harness four oxen ; he will be quite capable of guiding them to the place where he wishes to be buried !'

"Every one approved of this idea. So they made a rough cart, putting solid wheels to it, cut from the thickness of a great oak tree, and upon this they laid the body of the saint. Then the oxen, guided by the unseen hand of Ronan, walked straight forward into the

thickest part of the forest. The trees bowed down, or broke short off before their steps, with fearful crackings. Arrived in the very centre of the forest, where the largest oak trees grew, the cart stopped short ; so every one understood, and they buried the saint there, and built his church over him."

The people's story, more legendary, has yet its special charm. I have gathered the principal events together in the very country where the saint passed the greater part of his life, and in the following pages you will find related at length, some of these extraordinary occurrences to which M. Renan barely alludes.

Ronan was born in Ireland, traditional home of most Celtic saints. One day I asked an old woman of Bégard—

"Where is this land of Ireland, whose name is always on your lips?"

"Well," said she, "I have been told that it was originally a little chip broken off from paradise. God fashioned it into a steep, lonely island, which He anchored by diamond cables in the midst of a sea quite unknown to sailors. So soon as it touched the waters they lost their bitterness, and, for seven leagues around the island, became sweet as milk. The isle itself was hidden by a thick mist, which floated in a circle all around it, and a soft, unchanging light illumined the country. There, under the form of great white birds, lived the souls that were intended for the bodies of saints ; and from thence, at the call of God, they started forth to evangelize the world. I ought to tell you that originally they were of the number of eleven hundred

thousand. When the hour has struck for the departure of the last, the diamond cables will part asunder, and the island remount to heaven as lightly as a cloud."

In those early days there were cod fisheries off the Breton coast, and it was not unusual for the fishermen to remain whole weeks together at sea. One night when the men were asleep, stretched in their boats, a great disturbance began in the water. The man on guard roused his companions.

"Look!" said he; and they saw a very strange sight. A rock came sailing towards them, leaving a long quiet track behind it, as though the waves trembled at its touch. It was garlanded with unknown seaweeds, that exhaled so sweet and strong a scent that all the air, and even the sea, was perfumed. On the summit of the rock a figure knelt in prayer, with head surrounded by a nimbus, the glory of which illumined the night. It was Saint Ronan, who had come to dwell on the shores of Armorica.

He landed in one of the little bays of Léon, and he could not have made a more unfortunate choice. The coast just there was inhabited by wreckers and pirates. They worshipped rude gods, whom they identified with the oak of the forest and the reef of the ocean. They did not rob the saint, whose only possession was his cloth robe, too shabby for them to covet, but they made no secret of the fact that his presence was objectionable to them; and when he began talking about the new law, the law that the Christ had sealed with His blood, they turned their backs on him with contempt, and called him a dreamer, the most opprobrious name they could use. So Ronan was obliged to give up the conversion of

these savages ; but he made up his mind to try and render them less dangerous to other people.

The Irish saints never travelled without a bell, whose sound, among other virtues, was able to make itself heard distinctly to the furthest limits of the earth. So Ronan used his on foggy nights to warn off vessels that were out of their course, and to let them know they were nearing the coast. Thus shipwrecks became rare, in spite of the fires the natives lighted on the hilltops, and the people of the land were filled with indignation. The women were especially indignant.

"Up to this hour," they cried, "the sea has been our nurse, with a breast that never failed us. Jewelled bodies used to come ashore on our beach, and the storm was our benefactor ; every morning brought us some harvest. Think, oh men, think of the casks of golden wine from which your lips have so often quaffed the mysterious drunkenness, that doubled your strength, excited you, and made us more beautiful and desirable in your eyes. But already those days are over. From the moment when this foreign hermit appeared in our midst, our good fortune left us. He must be some wicked magician ; he has thrown a spell over us, and determined that we should perish miserably. Why do you not arise and rid yourselves of him ?"

These words came to the ears of the saint ; and in order not to bring punishment upon the people who had maligned him, he made up his mind to leave them, and go far away into the depths of the country ; and accordingly, having tucked up his hermit's gown, he started forth to find another home. The rock upon which he had crossed the waters, his "Stone Mare," as



IT WAS THE EVENING HOUR, SO ESPECIALLY SWEET IN BRITANY

he called it, followed him in this new exile. They traversed unnamed rivers, made their way through dark forests, where they heard the trees reminding one another that they had once been gods. Sometimes impassable thickets stopped their onward path; then Ronan rang his bell, and the brambles parted asunder, and disentangled themselves of their own accord.

When at length they emerged from the woods they found themselves on a lofty plateau, carpeted only with gorse and sweet-smelling herbs. This region was dominated by a naked mountain, round as the cupola of a temple. Ronan stuck his pilgrim staff in the ground, and it became at once a granite cross, showing him that this was the spot in which he was to settle. The Stone Mare lay down on the earth, the saint sank upon his knees in prayer. It was the evening hour, so especially sweet in Brittany. At the foot of the mountain, towards the west, lay smiling fields, and from unseen roofs, veiled in foliage, calm spirals of smoke rose into the air. Further off stretched the sea, among whose waters, grey as ashes, the last rays of the vanished sun were dying.

"May peace for ever dwell in this quiet land," murmured the saint. His wish has certainly been fulfilled; perhaps in no part of the world is the silence greater, deeper, more soothing, than upon this humble Breton summit. It has preserved its primitive appearance, its unchanged look of long ago. There are boughs of broom centuries old. Cattle come to browse on the short grass in springtime, but man himself has not ventured to change the face of the ground; it remains just as it was twelve hundred years ago, a virgin height, an oasis of dreamland.

Here Ronan passed exquisite days, face to face with the breezes that flew straight over from Ireland, bringing him perfumed messages from his far-away home. He built a hut on the western slope, a penitentiary cell, roughly made from branches tied together, and plastered over with a little mortar. But he only came there at night, to say his prayers and to sleep. From earliest dawn he was afoot, wandering about the mountain paths. He set himself a certain round to go twice a day, never varying it by a single step. In the morning he walked with the sun, in the evening against it. Even the rain did not stop him, but then it fell upon him without wetting him. This walk of his on the flank of the mountain occupied several leagues, and he would wander along for hours together, holding converse with all kinds of things, whose silent language he understood. He loved all the beasts, and they came to him when he called them. From afar they would see him coming, and run to meet him. It is said that in order to gain their confidence he would sometimes amuse himself by assuming their form; he tamed even the most ferocious, and then preached to them.

The story is told of a certain wolf who held him in great esteem, and who, in order, as he thought, to give him pleasure, came one day and laid a poor gasping little lamb at his feet. The good saint first took the lamb and healed it, and then addressed so touching a sermon to the wolf, that he converted him entirely from his evil ways, so that from that time the saying has arisen, "As gentle as Saint Ronan's wolf!"

But just as he sought the friendship of animals and loved the company of plants, so did he shun the society

of man. Since his unpleasant experiences on the inhospitable coast of Léon, he had retained somewhat painful remembrances of them, and distrusted them. If a human being happened to cross his path, he would look at him with such terrible eyes that the unhappy man was idiotic for weeks. It was the saint's method of keeping the road that he had chosen free for himself.

But though he gained his point, and was left alone, his reputation suffered a good deal. All kinds of stories began to be told about him. People spoke of him as a sorcerer, a wizard; shepherds declared that they had seen him running about disguised as a were-wolf; he was accused of scattering all sorts of ills about the country. They made him responsible for every defect of the weather, of which he was reported to have the supreme command. Did a hailstorm destroy the crops in the plain, or a sudden tempest tear up the sea, so that the fishing-boats were destroyed, it was all owing to the evil magic of Ronan.

And, really, it must be confessed that, far from trying to quiet these ideas, he sometimes seems to have taken pains to exasperate people.

One day, for instance, as he was walking under the spreading shadows of the forest of Névet, close to his hermitage, he saw a woodman preparing to cut down an oak tree. Each blow of the axe drew from the tree a heavy sigh that echoed sadly in the heart of the hermit.

"Why are you ill-treating that Old Man of the Woods?" asked he, wrathfully.

"I want to make some planks for my granary," answered the man.

"Be careful that they are not used for your coffin!" replied the saint.

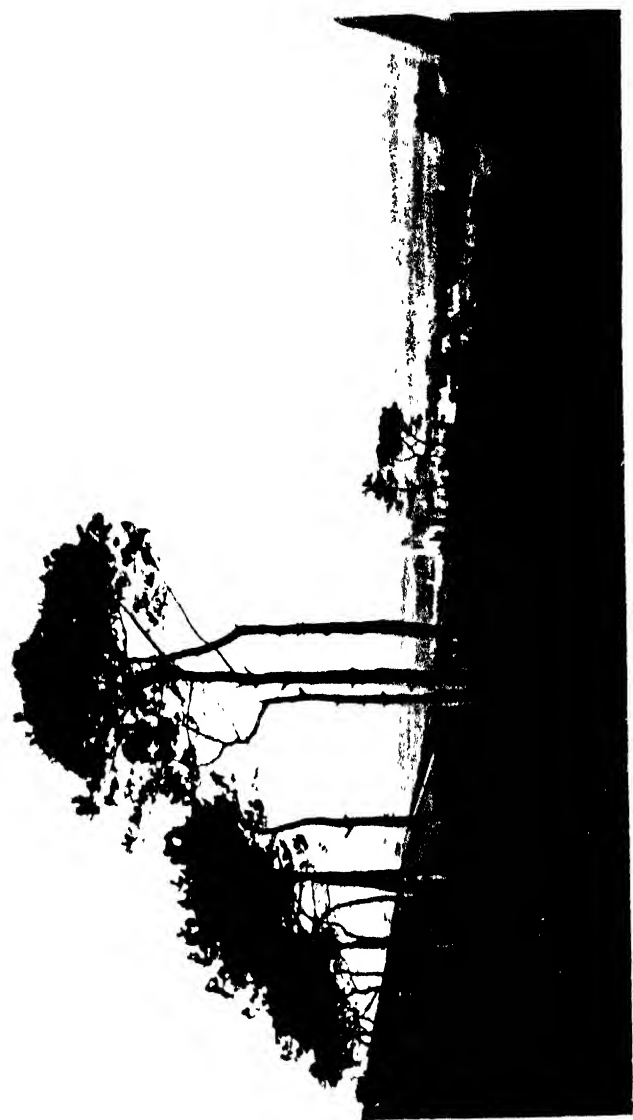
At the same instant the oak fell, crushing the woodman beneath it. No one doubted for an instant that Ronan was the culprit, and the people of the country began to think of nothing else but how they might rid themselves of him. Secret councils were held in the forest clearings by the pale light of the moon, that goddess of nocturnal plots, still adored by these pagans. Just as every one had agreed that the hermit must be surprised in his hut, and murdered during his sleep, the head of the house of Kernévez, a wise, broad-minded man, interrupted the discussion by observing that such conduct would not only be wicked, but very dangerous.

"It is," said he, "one of two things: either this Ronan has not the power which you attribute to him, in which case why break all laws, human and divine, by murdering him? or he does possess them, and, if so, how can your feeble conspiracies prevail against him? If he is the enchanter you believe him to be, he has nothing to fear from your enmity; while you, if you offend him, have everything to dread from his anger."

This argument cooled the zeal of the most eager.

"In your place," continued the master of Kernévez, "I should choose a deputy, and send him to represent your grievances. Between ourselves, I do not think you will find him as wicked as you imagine. I have several times followed him at a distance in his morning walks. Shall I tell you what he has been doing? Setting flies free from those light webs the spiders weave by night over the gorse bushes! . . . A wicked spirit would never care about such things."

LOOKING FROM THE MOUNTAIN
TO THE OCEAN



A voice cried from among the crowd—

"Well, go you on our behalf, and plead our cause with him!"

"I was just about to propose that very course," answered the head of the house, the Penn-tiern, with the quiet modesty that was habitual to him.

So without further delay he set off for the mountain. The moon had gone down, but on the crest of the hill the hermit's cell shone like a mysterious shrine. Ronan was asleep, stretched on the bare earth, his hands crossed, his head surrounded by a strange light, while over the doorless threshold lay his feet. The master of Kernévez sat down on the grass and waited for the saint to wake. He felt his heart stirred vaguely, and into his rude brain came strange thoughts that surprised and frightened him.

At last the dawn began to break. As soon as the first sun-ray fell on the back of the Stone Mare, she uttered a soft whinny, and the anchorite opened his eyes. He did not seem in the least surprised at seeing the Penn-tiern outside his hut in an attitude of supplication, but going up to him, commanded him to rise and follow him. Then they began to walk together in that high solitude. Their sight wandered afar, over land and sea bathed by the new-born sun in a purple vapour, above which hung ineffable harmonies of colour. The master of Kernévez had always lived in this place, he knew its every detail, but now for the first time its inner meaning was revealed to him. It seemed as though he were looking upon it with new-made, clearer eyes, and he began to shed tears, without knowing why, like a child, or a drunken man. Then said Ronan to him—

"Aye, weep, weep! It is God entering into your soul!"

Around them the bracken was fresh; warm, gentle breezes played in the clear air. Never had the morning been more beautiful, never had the world appeared more exquisitely winning.

When Ronan felt that the soul of his companion was sufficiently softened, moistened, ready to receive the good grain, he began to tell him the wonderful story of Jesus, who consecrated the wilderness as a place of prayer; of Jesus, who preached from the tops of the mountains, with the sea spread out at his feet, and taught the sons of men the lesson of Universal Love. The hermit, of whose fierce humour the Penn-tiern had been warned, spoke with such power and sweetness, the stories he told of that Galilean Life were in themselves so captivating, that the listener forgot everything else. At length the saint, pointing to the grey wing of evening that began to overshadow the sky, was obliged to dismiss him.

"Well, what had the great man of the mountain got to say?" asked the people of the plain, the shepherds, and the fishermen, when the master of Kernévez reappeared among them.

So he told them, word for word, what Ronan had spoken, for it was all engraven on his memory, and he could reproduce it even to the tone of the voice. In his simplicity he was eloquent. More than one of his audience seemed touched. But the others, the majority, after having listened as though stupefied, began to murmur against him. They could not understand how such a wise man as the Penn-tiern could

suddenly have become an apostle of these new ideas, so destructive of their ancient religion. They came to the conclusion that the hermit had bewitched him, and their hatred of Ronan increased; while towards the master of Kernévez they felt that superstitious pity that in Brittany is always given to fools and lunatics.

But he neither retorted nor complained. He saw his dearest friends become estranged without any feeling of resentment. According to Ronan, this was but the usual lot of any one wishing to enter the holy life. He never passed a day without meeting the anchorite, in a place agreed upon by themselves, on the border of the land of Kernévez, half up the mountain slope. A hedge of wild plum trees sheltered them from prying eyes, pine trees shaded their heads, and through a clearing they could see the sea, stretching away into the distance, opening a field of immensity to their thoughts and common meditation. There this rough disciple of Ronan was gradually initiated into the charms of a contemplative life. He became so enamoured of it, that soon he began to look upon other cares as unworthy of his high calling. In order to taste the joys of the soul, this peasant laid aside all worldly passions. He who had always been regarded as a model farmer now neglected his fields, ceased to superintend his business, left the servants to act as masters. People of the neighbourhood began to gossip about him. Finally, one day, his wife heard of it.

As his business kept him out-of-doors, while she had to stay at home to look after the house, he had been able to steal away on his pious escapades without arousing her suspicions. But he had always foreseen

that one day or other he would be found out. At last certain friendly neighbours informed against him.

One evening, as he was returning to the farm, after an interview with Ronan, he found his wife on the road, waiting for him.

"So," cried she, "this is the way you behave yourself! I have been hearing nice things about you! When you ought to be at work among the servants you are idling away your time upon the mountain, in company with a disreputable rascal, who is the scorn and terror of the neighbourhood. Have you made up your mind that your children are to be beggars, and I, your wife, to die of grief?" . . .

Tradition, which retains some things, and forgets others, has lost the name of the master of Kernévez, but tells us that the wife was called Kébèn. Mons. de la Villemarqué wishes us to see in her a kind of fierce Druidess, Queen of the Sacred Wood. The country-folk, however, paint a less picturesque, but perhaps truer picture of her. She was probably a notable farmer's wife, rather mean, hard on herself, and hard on others, occupied entirely in saving money, and leaving her children an estate free from debt. Of a headstrong character, she ruled her household with a rod of iron. For the rest, she was a capable, respectable woman, seldom ordering anything save what was judicious. She had always kept her husband well in hand, and it is easy to imagine her fury when she found that he had deceived her. She ordered him to give up the saint at once. For the first time in his life he rebelled, and to all her threats and scoldings returned nothing but a gentle, determined refusal. From that moment,

the manor of Kernévez, once so orderly and peaceful, became a hell upon earth. From morning till night Kébèn rushed about the great kitchen like a wolf in a cage, grinding her teeth and shouting. The children shrank away into corners, behind the furniture, and cried quietly, afraid to go near her. Labourers and servants left the house one after another ; the place fell into disorder, flocks and herds, no longer cared for, wandered miserably about the fields. Meanwhile the man continued to visit the saint on the mountain, paying no regard to the ruin that began to face him on all sides. He cared no more for earthly things. He dwelt in his dream as in some high tower, whence he could see nothing but heaven.

And now another kind of passion began to sway Kébèn. She became possessed of a fixed idea of revenging herself on Ronan, whom she described as a Ravisher of Men. She joined the enemies of the saint, and we know that they were numerous. Secret meetings were held at Kernévez during the absence of the husband, at which they drank mead out of buffalo-horns. At the end of a few days of this kind of thing, Kébèn, before a gathering of fanatics, excited almost to frenzy, proposed that they should go that night, under cover of darkness, to the house of the hermit, set fire to it, and burn him alive.

"Come ! Come !" they cried, as with one voice.

But their enthusiasm was short lived. The fresh night air soon sobered them, and in place of their excitement they began to feel certain mysterious forebodings. They fancied they heard threatening voices in the wind. The undergrowth into which their feet

sank seemed a magic net laid to entrap them ; and at last a strange apparition terrified them nearly out of their senses. The gigantic form of a beast arose on the mountain, and thrice a frightful neighing rent the air. All the band scattered like a flock of sparrows. Only Kébèn remained, her hatred arming her against fear. At the call of the Stone Mare, Ronan emerged from his hut. He came towards the farmer's wife, saying—

“Take care that you do not cross the circle marked by the holly bushes. This is a place where no women are allowed.”

Then Kébèn, gathering herself together, prepared to spring at his face ; but when she tried to jump, some unknown force held her captive, and her limbs grew stiff beneath her, as though turned to stone. Then, with the impotence of rage, she flung out a torrent of curses, calling the saint by the most odious names she knew.

“Yes,” she shrieked, “you forbid women to come to your lair, but you attract the men, you evil sorcerer! . . . Tell me, what have you done with the master of Kernévez ? What maddening potion have you given him ? . . . We never interfered with you ; then why did you come after us ? . . . Look at that house down among the beech trees ! We worked there happily and quietly. A cheerful smoke rose from the roof, like a constant prayer to the gods on high. And now your arts have chased away all prosperity, and put ruin in its place. Where is now the peace of our souls ? You have made war between husband and wife. By the sun and the moon I curse you !”



CARVING ON THE PULPIT OF LOCKMAN CHURCH

The saint, with his eyes raised on high, prayed quietly. As soon as he had finished, he said—

“Woman, I give you back the use of your limbs. Return to your children, whom you have forgotten to feed this evening. Their crying hinders me from hearing what you say.”

And, in fact, a soft, plaintive sobbing came up on the sea-breeze.

“We shall meet again,” growled Kébèn, in a tone of defiance.

“God grant that it may be in heaven!” answered Ronan.

The mistress of Kernévez returned to her home, her heart sore within her. For many days she remained crouching on the hearthstone, neither speaking nor sleeping. And in the stillness and silence she was brooding over a horrible idea. One night when she was sure that every one was asleep, she rose and went into the room where the children were lying. There, among her brothers, was Soëzic, the eldest girl, scarcely eight years old, a pretty little fair-haired creature, delicate as an angel.

She was her father's favourite, on account of her gentleness and sweetness. Taking her carefully into her arms so as not to awaken her, Kébèn went silently out to the barn. In one corner of this building, hidden behind a stack of faggots, was an old disused chest, hollowed by fire from the trunk of an enormous oak, with sides as thick as those of some granite sarcophagus, made for the burial of a great chieftain. The unnatural mother laid her child at the bottom of the chest, shut the heavy lid, double-locked it, and then, having once

more taken her seat beside the hearth, began uttering the most frightful cries, like those of an animal whose throat is being cut. The master of Kernévez jumped out of bed, terrified.

"What is the matter, wife? In the name of God, what is the matter?"

For answer she pointed to the door of the children's room. Going in, he saw that the little girl was missing. Already the neighbours had come running at the noise; the kitchen was soon full of inquisitive faces. And then at last Kébèn spoke.

Since her quarrel with the saint she had been expecting something of this kind to happen. He had threatened her with it, that was why she had been on the watch. And now to-night, when she had dropped asleep from weariness, she had been awakened suddenly by a voice crying feebly—

"Mamm! mamm!"

She had tried to rouse herself, but in vain. Some charm paralyzed her. At the same moment the monstrous form of a man-wolf passed close to her, carrying in his jaws the bleeding body of Soëzic.

It was quite evident that this man-wolf was no other than Ronan; such was the universal verdict. The husband would have interposed, have uttered a protest; but all minds were quite made up, and no one would listen to a word. It was decided then and there to go to King Gralon-Meur at Quimper, to tell him of the horrible crime, and demand justice on the culprit.

So the procession, growing larger with every village through which it passed, accompanied Kébèn to the palace of the king. Gralon was impressed by so large

a gathering, and sent a band of archers with orders to fetch the saint immediately. As soon as he saw him he felt that the people had spoken the truth. With his hairy face, his burning, ascetic eyes, shadowed by shaggy brows, with his rough cloth coat, dirty, worn, ragged, yellow like the skin of a wolf, and taken in at the waist by a girdle of tough bark, with his feet soiled by mud, and the nails of his fingers pointed and black like claws, the hermit certainly had the appearance of a wild beast rather than of a human being.

"We will soon tell whether his nature is that of a wolf or a man," said Gralon. "I have two dogs here who will show us."

The terrible beasts were loosed upon Ronan; but instead of tearing him in pieces, they lay quietly down at his feet, licking his rags, and begging him to caress them.

The crowd was altogether stupefied, and Gralon-Meur, coming towards the anchorite, bowed low and said—

"There must be some wonderful power about you to have impressed my dogs. Speak then, and put your accusers to silence, that justice may be done."

"I will speak," answered Ronan, "not for my own sake, who am accountable only to God, but because of the child, the innocent victim of this horrible plot. Send some one, oh King, to bring hither the great chest that stands in the barn at Kernévez, behind the heap of faggots."

This was done according to his wish, and when they opened the great oak trunk there lay the little girl, white as wax. She was stretched on her side, dead! The heart must have been hard indeed that did not

weep at the sight. Ronan himself, it is said, for the only time in his life, showed marks of feeling. He leaned down over the little body, and calling her by name very softly, murmured—

“Little Soëzic, pretty floweret, your eyes have closed too soon. God wishes you to open them again, and gaze for a long while yet on the blessed sun.”

He spoke! . . . The fresh tints of childhood came once more into the face of the dead child, and she rose smiling from the depths of the chest. The crowd, delighted at the sight of the miracle, leapt with joy, shouting the praises of the saint, crying that Kébén ought to be stoned. But Ronan said—

“I wish this woman to return home, safe and sound!”

From that day forth the hermit lived respected by all those who had formerly ill-treated him, and the religion he professed soon replaced the ancient cults. But, for all this, he changed none of his habits, abstaining as much as ever from all direct converse with men; living, in fact, even more privately than before, so that the veneration he inspired remained tinged with a certain amount of fear. People used to watch him from afar on his daily rounds, but no one ever had the boldness to interrupt him. When any wished to speak to him it was done through the medium of the master of Kernévez, the one human creature whom he received willingly, and to whom he condescended to listen.

Saint Corentin came one day to visit him in his hut, in order, so it is said, to resign the bishopric of Quimper in his favour. He found the entrance closed by a simple spider's web, which, when he tried to pass, could

not be broken ; so he understood that Ronan refused to receive him, and set forth again on his road back to Quimper, not without a little vexation.

It was in the springtime, on the vigil of Good Friday, that the Hermit of the Mountain died. As soon as his soul had passed, great strange clouds rushed from all parts of the sky, and gathered about the summit, spreading a veil of darkness over the surrounding country, while upward from the shrine rose a column of white smoke. By these signs every one knew that Ronan was no more ; but they waited three days before venturing to cross the circle of the sacred holly trees. The temper of the saint was to be dreaded, even after his death. At last the Penn-Tiern himself entered the cell. The corpse presented no sign of decomposition. It was lying in the attitude that the hermit had always assumed during life, his active feet across the doorsill, the scattered strands of hair luminous like flames. With one hand he pressed to his bosom a book, with richly chased clasps—no doubt, thought the peasants, a list of magical charms—with the other he grasped his bell, the musical companion of his wanderings.

We have already seen the manner of his funeral. As soon as the body had been placed upon the cart, the oxen began to march and the iron bell to ring. All through the journey it sounded thus, with little, slow, thin strokes, like a funeral knell. The team immediately took to the route which Ronan had been accustomed to follow morning and evening. While crossing the land of Kernévez, the procession came to the place where Kébèn was busy washing. Ever since the episode

of the chest, this curious woman had made no allusion whatever to it, but she was neither improved nor softened. Ronan's forbearance, instead of appeasing her hatred, had increased it. On hearing of his death she had fallen into such paroxysms of joy that for a moment every one thought her mad. Not only did she refuse to wear mourning, like the other women of the district, but she chose the day of the burial to do her washing, thereby committing a double scandal, for it was the feast of Easter. The procession advanced in a silent throng to the sound of the little bell, when suddenly above the noise of the washing-racket, rose a mocking song from behind the willows that bordered the "Lavoir"—

" Bim baon, cloc'hou !
Marw ê Jégou,
Gant eur c'horfad ywadigennou. . . . " *

Singing thus, in a loud, strident voice, Kébèn faced them impudently. The oxen, however, turned aside into the meadow, and walked straight forward, taking no notice of the linen spread out to dry on the grass. Already they had trampled some of the fine clothes under their hard hoofs, when Kébèn all at once ceased singing. Dishevelled, black with fury, she flung herself at the heads of the creatures. " Back, dirty beasts ! " cried she ; and brandishing her heavy wooden racket, she struck them so violently that she broke the horn of one of them. But on they went, in their quiet, gentle

* " Bim baon, the bells !
He died, Jégou,
From eating too much black pudding ! "



THE CROSS OF KEBEN

way, taking no notice whatever of her. Then the rage of Kébèn fell on the corpse. She clung to the cart at the risk of being knocked down, and, at each turn of the wheels, mad, fierce words, curses never to be forgiven, came pouring from her lips—

“Go, carrion! Go to the charnel-house, where the body of your mother, the wolf, lies rotting! You ought to be satisfied, scourge of families that you are! . . . Thanks to you, the best linen of the neighbourhood is in rags. Laugh! worker of evil, knave of knaves! dangerous even in death! . . . Ha, ha! And to think that there are fools who are mourning for you! . . . As for me, here is my farewell!”

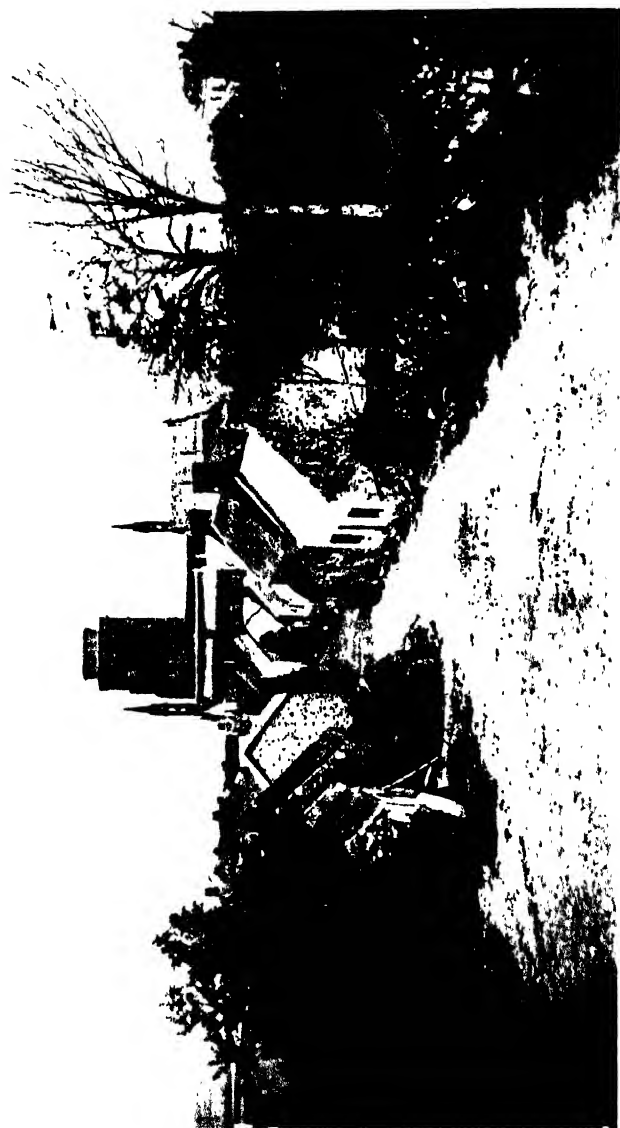
Horrible profanation! As she spoke, she struck him on the face. But it was her last action. The earth at the same moment opened its jaws and swallowed her alive.

After about three hours' journey the bell ceased. The oxen stopped; they were in the midst of the forest, on the western side of the mountain. A grave was soon dug, but when they tried to put the body of the saint into it, the united efforts of twenty men were powerless to lift him.

“Perhaps he doesn't wish to be buried,” ventured some one; “let us leave him as he is, and see what happens.”

Then occurred the most curious thing. In the space of a single night the body turned to stone, became one with the top of the cart, which in its turn was transformed into a funeral slab, so that Ronan lay there an eternal figure as though sculptured in granite. The trees around had likewise become stone; they soared

upward with all the delicate grace of pillars, interlacing their branches on high in the form of a roof. Such, according to the legend, was the design of the first church of Locronan ; and of the tomb, which you may still see in the chapel of the Pénity.



JOE ROYAN FROM THE OLD ROAD

CHAPTER II

IF ever you visit Locronan, be sure to approach it from the "old side." The ascent at first is not attractive, being rather a ravine, or torrent-bed, than a road. But as you near the summit you will find that the track widens, grows smoother, assumes once more the noble, easy character of an ancient royal road. Shut in on the west by a rising in the ground, to the south and north the prospect opens little by little. Behind lie the huge blue billows of the country of Quimper; to the right the sacred mountain rises toward the sky, its great hump scored with deep wrinkles, where sprays of broom make one think of yellow flames running over the soil. To the left a green country—luminous green, yellow-green—stretches in undulating verdure away to the ocean. Pine trees border the road, but do not hide the view, which smiles back at one from between the bare trunks; while overhead sounds the ærial song of their crested tops. And in no other part of Brittany does one breathe so freely what the poet calls—

"L'ivresse de l'espace, et du vent intrepide. . . ."

The wind flies with unwearying wing over this high ground. You are, so to speak, face to face with the great Atlantic, and he blows with his rough salt breath full in your face, reddening your skin with his fierce

kisses. The noise of the waves sounds so distinct that you seem to be standing on the top of the beach, and almost expect a splash of foam to wet your legs. But no! from the depths that yawn in front a clock-tower rises, a clock-tower deprived of its steeple; an enormous square tower, with long, narrow openings, from whence fly, not sea-gulls, but crows. Lower down is the church, sinking with age beneath its high roof; and near it is the graveyard, a fold of the mountain closed in by ruinous walls, and thickly covered in grass. A rapid, winding descent, almost a street, with the remains of ancient paving. Once, years ago, in some prosperous age that is now but a sad memory, it was by this road that the diligence from Quimper to Brest entered Locronan, with tumult of chains and of bells, scattering movement, cheerfulness, life on the way. Women with babies in their arms ran to the doors of the little low houses, which, even to-day, all bear over the lintels the date and name of the ancestor who built them. Even the men themselves, weavers for the most part, would rise on the pedals of their looms, and through the open windows greet the postilion with a joke, the passengers with a good wish for the journey. And now, alas! of all this life there remains but a mournful remembrance. The railways have killed the coaches, as machinery has destroyed hand labour. Of the weavers there are perhaps half a dozen, who more often than not are out of work. At the beginning of the century there were some hundred and fifty, who supplied all the ports of Cornouailles with sailcloth. From morning to night there sounded, according to an inhabitant, "the lively sound of the shuttle."

People will tell you that it was Saint Ronan who invented this industry (no doubt in the intervals between his walks), and that he taught the Penn-tiern, his companion in prayer. Before his days the fishers used to hang skins of beasts to the masts of their ships. Ronan first planted the flax, and showed them the art of weaving the fibre, so that a stream of riches and plenty flowed through the land. The wealth of the men of Locronan became as famous as that of the shipowners of Penmarc'h. Speaking remains of this may be seen in the beautifully sculptured gables and the great solid house-fronts that surround the square. They are really grand houses, these, some in fine Renaissance. Though shorn of their ancient splendour, they still have an aristocratic appearance, preserving even in their decay an air of nobility and gravity, so that the humble town has something majestic and imposing about it. Nothing common or mean, rather the sad, solitary state of a beautiful ruin. One feels the melancholy while passing through the little streets, that wind in and out among the houses as they climb up towards the country, or plunge precipitously down into the depths of the suburb of Kélou-Mad (Good News). Here there is little to be seen but falling walls, scattered ruins covering the waste gardens for quite a long distance. Everything reminds one of a city crumbling stone by stone, never to rise again. Even the inhabitants leave it and emigrate day by day, as though some fate lay over it, some curse threatened thirteen hundred years ago by the Hermit of the Mountain.

But no, the spirit of Ronan has never abandoned his town. On the contrary, he is still its good genius. It

is thanks to him that now and again, at long, regular intervals, the old place recovers some slight semblance of life and cheerfulness. Once in seven years, just like those dead cities of which one sometimes hears in story, Locronan wakes up to find its empty spaces filled by a crowd of pilgrims. For a week it seems as though the gayest period of its history had returned. And it is the Troménie that performs this miracle.

CHAPTER III

TROMÉNIE is a corruption of Trô-Minihy, and signifies "Tour of the Refuge." In the ancient church of Brittany, these refuges, these Minihys, were sacred circles of one, two, three, or more leagues surrounding the monasteries, and enjoying valuable privileges. That which belonged to the monastery of Locronan covered a vast area, encroaching on four parishes: Locronan, Quéménéven, Plogonnec, and Plounévez-Porzay. The pilgrimage of the Troménie consists in making this tour, following the traditional line that has not varied for centuries. The mountain of Locronan seems to be the very centre of the festival, for the pilgrims scarcely leave its flank, and its enormous mass entirely shuts out all the view. Therefore, the faithful, not particularly careful about a derivation whose meaning they have lost, connect "Troménie" with "Trô-ar-Ménez, which they translate as "The Pardon of the Mountain."

As to the road they traverse, you have no doubt guessed already that it is identical with that which Ronan the Walker chose during his lifetime. A strange track, not really a road at all, a kind of mystic path, scarcely worn, only marked here and there by calvaries. Indeed, it is not everywhere easy to find, but then, in an emergency, the saint himself often undertakes the office of guide.

A poor woman told me the following story :—

She had vowed to make the pilgrimage by night, and had started forth at dusk, reckoning on the moon to light her on her way. But the moon never came out. Thick clouds rising from the sea spread over the sky. The old woman journeyed on nevertheless, stumbling over stones, sometimes knocking herself against the banks. In the midst of the moorland she stopped ; she no longer had any idea which way to turn in the darkness. A great terror seized upon her. She was on the point of renouncing her vow, when suddenly she heard a pitying voice that gave her courage.

“Put your feet where I put mine!” said the voice.

She tried to see who was speaking, but in vain. She could distinguish nothing save two bare feet of glittering whiteness, that walked before her, and left shining impressions on the ground. With their assistance she was thus enabled to finish her pilgrimage.

“Be merciful,” she cried, joining her hands ; “tell me your name, that I may bless it to the hour of my death.”

“You have just been using it in your litanies,” answered the voice.

And then she understood, and knelt to kiss the feet of the saint ; but he had disappeared.

As early as the twelfth century the Troménie took rank among the great religious gatherings of Brittany. Whole clans came to join in it from the most distant places, from the extreme limits of Trégor, from the depths of the country of Vannes. Saint Yves took part in it, accompanied by his inseparable Jehan de Kergoz.

Later, the very dukes thought it their duty to show themselves at it. The report had already spread that it was needful to have been to Locronan in order to reach heaven. One year the festival was invested with peculiar honour. Splendid noblemen, in rich clothing, mounted on gorgeously caparisoned horses, poured out from Plogonnec, followed by a multitude of men-at-arms, and preceded by a company of trumpeters blowing with all their might. They were escorting a litter, from which, just as the procession crossed the market-place, a tiny little young woman, in the head-dress of the period, descended. She was well bred and sprightly, with very soft clear eyes, and a pretty obstinate Breton forehead. As soon as the relics had passed by she came forward and joined a group of farmers' wives, who, dressed in red cloth embroidered with gold and silver, formed a guard of honour to the statue of Saint Anne. Over the rough pebbles of the deep lanes and through the prickly gorse of the moorland, she walked uncomfortably in her little boots, and every one took her for some rich young lady of the town; but on she went, brave and resolute, never uttering a word of complaint on the roughness of the road. Bending over the Book of Hours, held by a neighbour, she chanted the canticle in unison with the other voices. And all the length of the Troménie she sang; you would have thought some sweet nightingale was breathing forth its song from between her lips, such grace and beauty did she give to the rude syllables of the Breton verses. The lads who carried the banners were continually turning their heads to look at her. Afterwards they discovered that her name was the "Duchess Anne," and that she was the

wife of the King of France. Good, dear duchess ! I have often asked people of Trégor about you, and found that for them you are nothing but a symbol. Yet here in Cornouailles your memory still lives, almost your person. In a little hut beneath the beech trees, last vestige of the forest of Névet, I have heard the sabotiers speak of you as though they had actually known you. They described your face, downy like some beautiful fruit, praised your hair, your smile, your charming manner, remembering even the quality of your voice. It would take but little to make them believe that they were actually present at that Troménie in which you took part. After that, who will dare to doubt the magic influence of Ronan ? But there are other proofs if needed !

For example, that fantastic Troménie which the saint they say conducted in person. Since the previous evening a tremendous rain had been falling, and the mountain in every direction was worn by torrents. The clergy decided that the procession should not take place, but had better be deferred till the following Sunday. This must have offended the irritable Saint Ronan, who, during his life, had taken no account of the weather when making his morning and evening tour. Suddenly the bells began pealing, an unseen choir sang the marching hymn, and through the great church door, which the sacristan swore he had locked, a wave of Troménieurs came flowing, then another, and many more, an interminable number. Nobody knew who they were, nor whence they came. They had yellow, mouldy faces ; their clothes were of a quaint, forgotten shape, and gave out a strange, musty smell. They sang without

moving their lips, and their voices were faint and far away, as though they came from the depths of the earth. At their head walked the wonder-working saint. Over his cloth robe he had donned the episcopal vestments. As he walked, the ground dried before him, and the respectful rain parted on either hand. The great, heavy banners spread forth, carried by the stiffened arms of mysterious old men, with athletic shoulders, and the silk, the embroideries, the figures, shone bright as on a sunny day. For overhead in the sky there was a hole in the clouds, through which the blue appeared, and it moved with the procession, keeping just above them like a canopy, while everywhere else rain fell in torrents. . . . Next day, when they looked at the banners, which had returned to their cases of their own accord, they found that not a drop of rain had touched them. Saint Ronan had evidently wished to give his clergy and parishioners a good lesson. The warning was taken, and, since that day, the pilgrimage of the Troménie has never failed to start at the usual hour, on the proper day, whatever the weather may be.

CHAPTER IV

GENERALLY it is fine, for the festival begins on the second Sunday in July, the pleasantest part of the Breton summer. I assisted on the last occasion, in 1893. Very early in the morning I joined the Quimper pilgrims, and started by train from Douarnenez. We got down at a station called Guengat, a little lonely house, surrounded by moor and bog, many kilometres from any town or village. There was only one person by way of staff, a woman, whose chief duty consisted in watching a few trucks go by now and again, and in listening every evening to the distant Angelus. A narrow, stony track led to a country road, one of those delightful little Breton roads, which, like the race itself, go wandering about, loitering round a thousand corners, allowing themselves to be guided by their fancies, and never coming to any conclusion. We walked through luminous shadow, between banks draped with a profusion of plants, pale flowers, long fine grasses, hanging like hair. We saw nothing, heard nothing, save the moving shadows of the leaves on a pathway spangled with sunbeams, and a delicate sound of water running through the cress-beds on either side of the way.

Suddenly, through a break, appeared the sacred mountain, its rounded summit still steaming with the



THE PILGRIM WAY

mists of the morning. Faint silhouettes of pilgrims appeared on the top, and along the edges of the slopes. These are the solitary pilgrims, the most devout of all it is said, no doubt because more in character with the earliest tradition. It was midnight when they began their tour of the mountain. Already some are returning homeward, their faces a little tired, their clothes damp with dew. And here are we, by the first calvary at the foot of the mountain. On its steps women are seated, breakfasting on brown bread and bacon. As I pass, one of them calls out to me :—

“It’s no use hurrying ; you are too late. The saint is no longer at home.”

Directly they have concluded their devotions, our peasant women are always ready for a joke.

“Oh, well,” I answer, “then I shall go and see Kébèn !”

“Ah, you will be sure to meet *her* ; where once there was one, you will now find five hundred.”

You must know that the evil repute of the mistress of Kernévez has most unjustly descended to all the women of the district ; it has come down like a grease-spot through the centuries.

“Between Locronan and Quéménéven

There is not a woman who is not a Kébèn. . . .”

says a proverb, invented, I suppose, by some gossip of a neighbouring town, when the prosperity of the little industrial centre caused jealousy all around. The old Celtic exclusiveness remained strong in Brittany, and rivalries and race hatreds long existed between village and village in all their cheerful ferocity.

I can still hear my "Cornouaillaises," laughing, when I am high up the road. But as I go yet higher, I seem to enter a region of infinite silence. . . . There is something religious in the very air one breathes, something that always enfolds mountain-tops, causing our ancient Aryan forefathers to regard them as dwelling-places of the Most High. The breeze, that comes in slow, soft puffs, is full of rare perfume, the fine scent of aromatic herbs ; and the groups of clouds above look like great kneeling figures. . . . Then the sound of a little bell is heard, and a voice singing in Breton :—

"Passer-by, give alms ; for the love of Saint Thégonnec, give !"

In the depths of a hut, formed like that of Ronan, from interwoven branches, and covered with a sheet by way of roof, a man is crouching on a stool—a "Glazik," in a new waistcoat embroidered in a broad yellow pattern. Before him is a table, decorated like an altar, and on the table a saint's image, black, smoky—one of those rough statues peculiarly dear to the Armoricans, because of their very antiquity. A brass plate, half full of sous, is placed before the "Icon," to receive offerings. It is one of those mysterious toll-houses that stand here and there along the route of the Troménie. There are sixty or seventy of these huts scattered over the flank of the mountain. The four parishes whose land is included in the ancient "Minihy," set up these shrines to represent not only the patron saint of their church, but also the multitude of lesser saints worshipped in the little chapels of their district. Close at hand is a delegate, whose duty it is to sing a long rigmarole, enumerating the virtues and miracles of the saint, the marvellous

efficacy of his fountain, sometimes to present fragments of his relics to be kissed by pilgrims. The proverb, "Each one preaches his particular saint," never had a more direct and literal fulfilment. Thus the cult of Saint Ronan becomes a source of profit to all the worshipping places of the neighbourhood. But I should not like you to look at this ancient custom simply from its money-making point of view. A belief has spread through the whole peninsula that the saints of each canton ought to visit each other on the days of their respective pardons. If they are not taken, it is said that they will go of their own accord. Fishermen of the Trégor coast have assured me that they have seen Our Lady of Port-Blanc going at night by sea to the great votive festival of Our Lady of La Clarté. So we need not be surprised if the statues of Urlou, Corentin, Thujen, Thégonnec, and many other wonder-workers, old-established neighbours of Ronan, leave their chapels on the day of the Troménie, and come to salute him on the borders of his own territory! It would be cruel to grudge them any little alms they receive in addition; they are so poor, the good old saints, and their little rustic chapels are so miserable! . . .

Just at this spot the legendary path crosses the road. At one of the corners of intersection there rises a rude cross, cut all in one piece, made perhaps from some *menhir*, or more probably from one of those blocks of granite called "Lec'h," which, during the first ages of Christianity, served to mark sepulchres. It is the tomb of Kébèn. . . . The grass round about is thin and scorched; no flowers ever flourish there, even the brambles shrink away from it; and people follow their

example, crossing themselves as they hurry past, for who can tell if, in spite of the heavy monolith that weighs her down, the rebellious spirit shut up there may not suddenly burst forth like a volcano? However, I saw one old woman kneel before it, knowing what she was about, too, for to her daughter, who remonstrated, she answered, "You are still young; when you have been longer in the school of life, you will have learned pity!"

Troménieurs are passing every moment, grave, bare-headed, hat in one hand, chaplet in the other. They walk silently, without exchanging a single word; the Troménie is a silent Pardon, "Un Pardon Muet!" From their fixed, absent gaze, it is easy to guess that each soul is absorbed in silent prayer that nothing can disturb; not even the splendid view, which, seen from this height, seems to reach away into the distance like the moving, tinted rays of some gorgeous fan. They walk alone or in groups. Now a family with all its members, now a whole village, a clan of labourers journeying *en masse*, men, women, children, and dogs. The profiles stand out for a moment with singular clearness against the delicate blue of the sky, then vanish into the folds of the mountain.

One of the principal sections of the route is that which leads from the tomb of Kébèn to the Stone Mare. The track passes between gorse bushes, crosses some abandoned quarries, skirts a field or two of "black corn," and finally loses itself in a moor—a huge stretch of dry grass, shining in the sun like a great mirror, over which clouds cast broad shadows. In the midst of this space crouches the granite monster, and it really has

the strange colossal form of some prehistoric animal. The cult of which it is the object certainly goes back to a time long before the Christian era. Every one knows how deeply Celtic mythology was tinged with naturalism. Every object of nature seemed divine to the Celt, trees springs and rocks. These ancient ideas still live in the heart of the Breton of to-day. Christianity has either based itself upon them, or incorporated them in its teaching. Not being able to destroy them, it has absorbed them, and it is not needful to dig very deep in the soul of the race to find the original foundation. As for this stone of Ronan, it has long been associated with fruit-giving powers. It is not very many years since young wives would come hither during the first months of marriage to rub themselves against it, and childless women would sleep upon it for three consecutive nights, in the hope of at last knowing the joys of motherhood. In these days they are supposed to have given up these practices, but I doubt if they are as entirely dead as they seem to be.

The pilgrims of the Troménie generally content themselves with making a tour of the sacred stone. But the more religious, and people suffering from fevers and nervous maladies, seat themselves in a hollow of the rock—a sort of natural chair, sculptured by the rain, and used by Ronan during his hours of rest and meditation. From it he enjoyed one of the most beautiful of panoramas. The old hermits of the Armorican legend were certainly no morose ascetics, with a contempt for the beauties of nature. Rather do they make us think of the “Richis” of India. The austerities of the anchorite existence never destroy either delicacy of

feeling or freshness of imagination. If they sought solitude, no doubt it was in order to approach nearer to God, but also to enter into closer and more direct contact with the shy beauty of the world. They were poets as well as saints. The magic of nature bewitched them. Legend shows them to us, journeying for days and months before finally choosing a dwelling-place. Sometimes we hear that a stone rolled before them; that is to say, some higher instinct guided them. They would wait before building their cell till they came across a country that realized their dreams. Some required widespread horizon, others preferred the mystery of the valleys, whispering with rustling waters and shivering leaves. They nearly always arranged so as to have an opening toward the sea. In fact, a great many of their shrines are situated on the coast, the "Armor." They loved the sea for its own sake, just because it *was* the sea, the only thing in the world, perhaps, of which one never tires, and also because it was as the visible face of that eternity that possessed their souls. Finally, perhaps, because its far-off waves bathed their native land, the great cloudy isles of Ireland or of Great Britain, whence the Saxon scourge had driven them. On home-sick evenings, how often must their thoughts have traversed the tossing billowy waves towards the beloved monasteries of Iona, Clonard, Laniltud, Bangor. . . .

Before the eyes of Ronan, the Bay of Douarnenez—or, to speak as a Breton, The Bay, for in their opinion it is the only one—spread its lovely curve, while the fine sand on the shore sparkled, and the great promontories rose one after another, bold and rugged, dying away into



the distant waters. It is easy to understand the affection the saint acquired for this slope of the mountain. There is not a spot in all Brittany whence the eye may roam more freely over an eternal, yet changing landscape.

I reached the town in the company of a tottering, feeble old grandmother, who leaned one hand on her pilgrim staff, and the other on the shoulder of a boy of twelve or thirteen years, her great-grandson. The child shuffled along in clothes much too large for him, clothes that had descended, almost new, from some elder brother lost at sea. He had a funny little manner, very wide-awake, with something of an old man in his expression, and a curiously grave way of looking at one, that was full of far-away and premature sadness.

"He is just about to start on a long voyage," the good woman explained, "so I have been to present him to Saint Ronan. This is the ninth Troménie I have been to! Yes, this path has seen me pass nine times, with my husband, my sons, and the sons of my sons. I have mourned every one of them, and have buried none. They are all in the cemetery that has no cross. This is the last remaining to me. I have a fancy that the sea will take him like the others. It seems very hard, but every one must work out his fate." . . .

The little lad said nothing, only smiled vaguely at the booths set up in the square; and the sea, at the foot of the hills, lay green and glittering with gold, fascinating, singing like an exquisite siren, a catcher of men.

From without, the church of Locronan, chiefly built in the fifteenth century, has all the grandeur and size of a cathedral. Within, it is very curious. It is entered

through a vast porch, beneath a wide, round archway. From the very sill one is conscious of age, decay, and height—of solitary, rude height. Great shadows gather in the vaulting, creep along the walls. It suggests to the mind some dark wood, pierced here and there by green shafts of light. The awe of sacred forests pervades it. The mossy pillars look like those petrified trees of which the legend tells, or of the church of some drowned city, Tolente, Ker-Is, or Occismor; so do the walls breathe out moisture; so is the light which bathes them, strange, ghostly, and dusk.

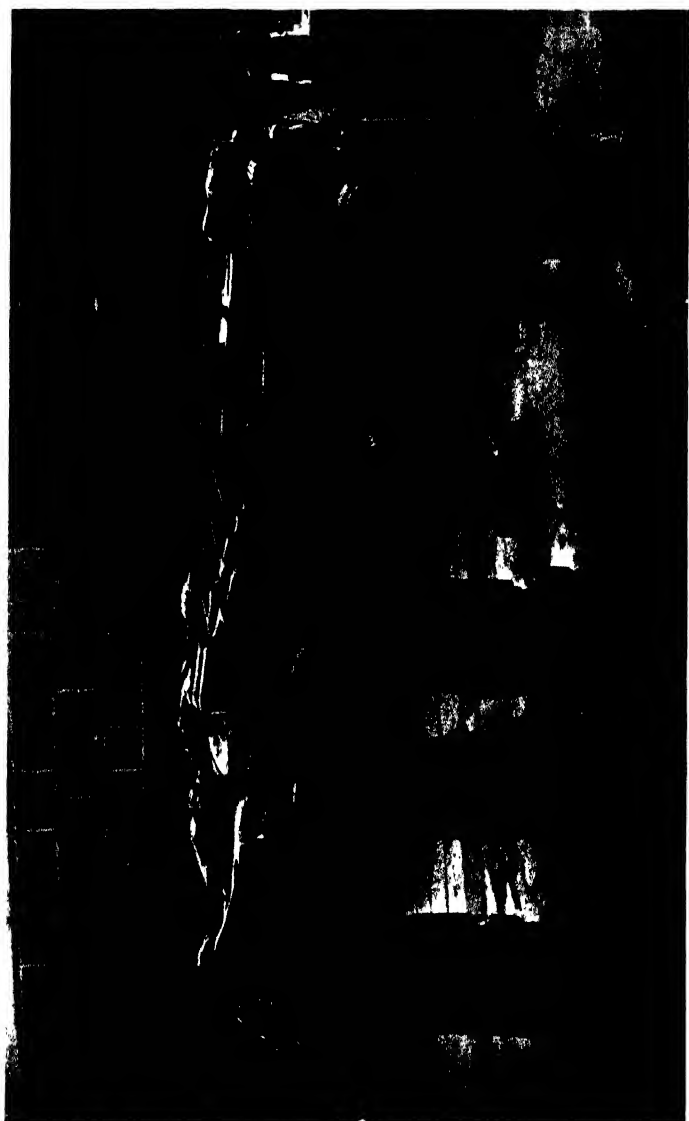
The chapel of the Pénity, beside the nave, shines with a brighter glow. There, on a slab of Kersanton, is the effigy of the anchorite, the roughly sculptured sacerdotal figure of Ronan. The features, though rude, are beautifully serene; his great, interrupted dreams still melting in his fixed eyes. One of his hands holds a pastoral staff, the other a Book of Hours. A priest is officiating at the altar. He blesses the congregation, and the procession round the tomb begins. The pilgrims pass in a close line, more women than men, and most of them from the region of Douarnenez.

They are fresh, rosy, like mother-o'-pearl, with grey eyes, the blue-grey of the flax-blossom. The cap that surrounds the face gives an air of sincerity and mysticism. One by one they touch with their foreheads the shuttle-shaped reliquary that is held by a deacon, then, turning toward the stone hermit, press their fresh lips, red with the mountain breezes, on his cheek.

And this is Ronan's true revenge!

According to Celtic belief, woman is an exquisite

THE LONG GAZE



and perverse sorceress, endowed with irresistible supernatural powers, able to take entire possession of man, without in any way giving over control of herself. Our popular poets have always sung about her with sad resignation, as their tragic love-songs testify. The saints ever feared this siren, considering her an insurmountable barrier between themselves and holiness. Efflam, for instance, constrained by his father to chose a wife, was so terrified by the beauty of Enora that he fainted on the floor of the bridal chamber. Without the aid of an angel, he would never have had the courage to flee. Enora having followed him across the perilous deep, he refused to listen to her voice, and had a cell built for her on the other side of the hill. Envel showed himself no less pitiless towards his sister Jûna; never once did he visit her in her cell, though they were only separated by the breadth of the valley. He only came to know of her death because the bell she used to ring at the hour of prayer ceased sounding.

Despised, anathematized by the saints, it was but natural that women resented such treatment. More than once we hear of naughty tricks they played, and we have seen with what hatred Kébèn pursued Ronan. Indeed, I have not told the whole story. One legend says that she publicly accused him of wishing to seduce her. We know how she treated him after his death, and it is said that the mark of the dirty racket reappears each Troménie, on the left cheek of the granite corpse. This it is, this ineffaceable injury, that the girls of Cornouailles come every seven years to try and wipe away with their kisses.

And now the bells are ringing. A death-knell sounds through the church, with slow, sad strokes, a choir of priests entones the prayers for the dead. The Troménie is not only a pilgrimage for the living ; the dead who did not succeed in accomplishing it during life, rise up from the Land of Souls and come to take part in it. Be sure, that among the people of flesh and blood kneeling on those stones, there are scattered a host of shadows, risen from the churchyards. A cold breath that makes one shudder, a musty scent that suddenly fills the atmosphere, and other suggestive signs, announce the approach of the dead, the mysterious coming of the "Anaon." In the porch, a woman of Plogonnec tells me how, last Troménie, as she was praying, she felt cold fingers tickling the back of her neck. Looking round, she almost fainted with surprise at finding herself face to face with her husband, whom she had buried the year before, and for whose soul she had just been saying a *De Profundis*. "I was going to speak to him ; but no doubt he saw that in my eyes, for he suddenly vanished."

The best place to enjoy the sight of the High Mass is from the top of the steps leading to the great portal. Through the open doors one can look right up the nave to the choir, where, behind a forest of high pillars, shines, as it were, a dazzling glade, bathed in golden sunshine. A wave of rough heads, clothed in the long hair of the Celt, rises in front. Behind come the women, prostrate in all kinds of attitudes. The wings of their caps tremble as the light falls upon them through the painted windows, dyeing them all manner of delicate shades. They look like a flight of sea-birds



LOOKING ROUND SHE ALMOST FAINTED WITH SURPRISE AT FINDING HERSELF FACE TO FACE WITH HER HUSBAND WHOM SHE HAD BURIED THE YEAR BEFORE.

caught in the church. And the singing drags on like a sound of weeping, singing for all the world resembling that of some ancient pagan ritual, very solemn, and very sweet.

From twelve o'clock to two there is an interlude. It is an exhausting Pardon, the Troménie, one where neither fatigue nor trouble is spared. Not only does it give indulgences, but a splendid appetite. The strong mountain air, sharpened by the sea-breeze and some five leagues of ravine and moor, would expand the stomach of even a townsman, still more that of a peasant. Besides, there are no religious festivals in Brittany but have some element of merry-making. Therefore, while the church is empty, the inns are full. Find a place if you can! Some settle down outside the town, in the shadow of a bit of wall, one of the ivy-clad ruins that scatter the country far and wide. The one hotel of the place, whose old front seems hopelessly mourning the death of the diligences, has put out its white awning as though for a wedding. There I lunch with the more-important Troménieurs, owners of fisheries, or rich farmers; people of Plonéis, Tréboul, Kerlaz, and Ploaré. Little breezes flutter the cloths, and set all the loose white things flapping around us. The crowd in the square goes and comes, growing more excited with its own noise as the minutes succeed each other, and a pious gladness begins to thrill the air. One thing is very noticeable, in the whole huge human buzzing there is not a single beggar's voice, not one of those miserable lamentations that haunt the ear at all the other Pardons of Brittany. The exhibitors of wounds, real or pretended, are seen

neither in the town of Locronan, nor on any portion of the pilgrimage route. The Troménie is arranged so as to discourage the infirm, the cripples, the deformed, the lame of all kinds. Before all things, it is the festival of the nimble.

CHAPTER V

YEARS ago, the honour of carrying the great banners in the procession of Saint Ronan was fought for with fists and *penn-baz*. Happy the parish whose champion won; for seven years it was sure of unequalled prosperity. For seven years, only boys, bread-earners, strong and useful, would be born there; the floors of the granaries would break beneath the weight of each harvest; the boats would return each evening laden with marvellous fish; and all hearts would flourish exempt from care, as in an earthly paradise. So the struggle for the banners grew more than once into a bloody struggle. . . chests were crushed, heads were broken. At last the clergy judged it necessary to send for assistance to have it stopped. But the presence of the soldiers, far from quieting the people, exasperated them. Every one took it for an attempt to control their liberties, and more, as an insult to the sacred festival. Why did not people leave them to arrange things among themselves? Indeed, what business had these intruders, these "Gallots," at the glorification of Ronan?

The Bretons worship their saints with a jealous worship. A wave of revolt passed through these excited brains; a hue and cry was raised against "Les enfants de Marie Robin," as the gendarmes are called in this part

of the country. At the Troménie held on July the 14th, 1747, a regular riot broke out, of which the official account in the public archives has preserved the remembrance. The gendarmes were pursued with showers of stones, and could only save themselves by the speed of their horses.

"Dao! . . . Dao! . . ." yelled the pilgrims; which the Sire Dugas translates in his soldierly style as, "Let us charge them again! let us plunder them!"

Nowadays, things are managed in a much more orderly fashion. The honour of bearing the banner is still a party matter, only it is paid for, going to the highest bidder. It is less democratic, no doubt; but fewer heads are broken, fewer vests left in rags. Devotion has lost scarcely anything, and the treasury of the saint has gained money, which, supplemented by the State, will perhaps help to repair the church, or even replace the spire that once crowned the tower.

But hark! . . . the old parish clock is striking. The bells have only been awaiting its sound to break forth all together, and merry carillons answer from distant churches and chapels, hidden under the woodland cover.

From out the porch come heavy old banners, with enormous staves, round which the fingers of the bearers are straining. They bend to issue from the arch, sweeping the ground with their fringes, then, raised with difficulty, fill out suddenly, like widespread sails. A shiver runs through the old silks; the sunshine sparkles on their golden spangles. The holy saints upon them seem to blink their eyes in the rays of the blessed sun, which they have not faced for seven years. Gradually

the procession forms. At the head march the gold and silver crosses, furnished with little bells that keep tinkling, tinkling perpetually, just as Ronan's little iron bell did once. It is there now, the magical bell, but dumb and motionless, resting on a velvet cushion, preceded by a figure of the saint. How they have smothered him in episcopal ornaments, for which, during life, he showed such disdain! I think he would have looked grander and more natural in his dark woollen robe, the colour of a beast's skin, the front half of his head shaven, in accordance with the canon of the Celtic tonsure, and in his hands, in place of a crosier, the staff of his unending pilgrimage. A long long line of saints follow. Then come the reliquaries, little gilt Noah's Arks, carried on rolling shoulders. Last of all appear the priests, and following on their heels, rough and tumbled, surges the crowd.

The drums and fifes give the signal to start; and under the sun, which darts its rays between the grey fronts of the houses, transfiguring them joyfully, the pageant unfolds its splendid, silent throng. The sky, the mountain, the sea, shine with the same fair light, broken only here and there at rare intervals by great sheets of purple shadow falling from the moving clouds. Everything in this fluid atmosphere seems, in a measure, molten. Nothing bounds the view; the distance fades and dissolves away.

But already we are plunging into the little lanes. We have left behind us the high-road, with its dust and its glare; the rustic shrines, which the clergy in passing salute with a hymn; we have turned our backs to the mountain, and to the light. . . . The earth is more and

more hollowed out beneath our footsteps. It is almost a sepulchral way, paved with granite bones. On either side high banks lean toward each other, and above them thick boughs interlace, and strange old stumps, looking as though they had been sculptured, twist and cross like the beams of an ancient manor-house. No longer can the sunlight enter ; it is with difficulty that the mysterious twilight filters through the branches to scatter here and there pale, silver tears. Every one walks silently, men and women glide quietly along with the furtive hurried movement of phantoms. "It seems almost like being in purgatory!" murmurs a peasant, with a sigh of relief, when, the giddy descent finished, we find ourselves once more beneath the open sky. And it would be difficult to give a better idea of the superstitious anxiety that seems to haunt everybody on this part of the journey.

And now everything is light once more, light and living. We paddle gaily through damp meadows ; we cross bogs on stems of iris, reeds, genista, cut this morning by the neighbouring shepherds ; we pass through farmyards, where girls are leaning their elbows on the wells, bowl in hand, offering drink to thirsty pilgrims. We traverse the territory of Kernévez, on the borders of Quéménéven. There the shadow of Kébèn still rests ; there is her washing-pool, under the willows ; there, too, the stone on which she used to kneel on washing days. The trace of her knees can still be seen, and they say that at midnight, on moonlight nights, she still appears, wringing her winding-sheet between her skeleton fingers, squeezing from it a horrible mixture of pus and blood. At all events, the



THE PLAC AR CHORN

curse that weighs on her has not descended to the place where she lived, for it is one of the most exquisite corners of the country, with rich meadows, an ocean of corn, avenues of superb beech trees. Here the Troménie rests pleasantly before gathering its forces together to make the great assault on the mountain.

From this side the Ménez rises, apparently inaccessible. It has all the steep abruptness of those heights on which the ancients built their holy places. Cross-bearers and carriers of banners attack it straight before them boldly, as though they were charging it. Do not imagine it is by way of showing off their strength. Unless they climbed this goat's path almost in a breath they would sink exhausted halfway. The drums and fifes do their best to cheer them, and the procession follows as best it can, helter-skelter, panting, flushed.

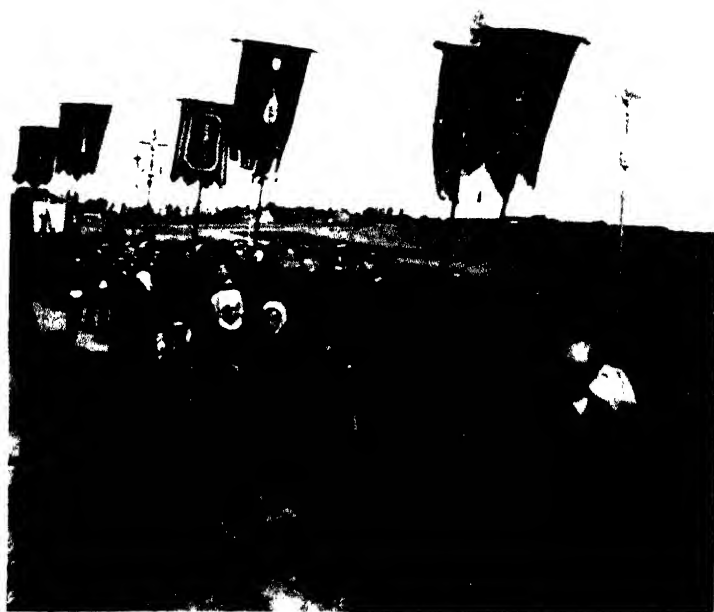
How good it feels to breathe the air on high, to fill one's lungs with the breeze from the Atlantic, and to sniff the freshness that is rising from the west at the first approach of evening! . . .

The spot we have reached on the high ground has kept the name of "Plaç-ar-C'horn." Kébén must have had a strong arm to send the horn of Ronan's ox flying all this distance with one blow of her racket. The cart that bore the corpse of the saint stopped, they say, for a few moments at this place, no doubt in order to allow the hermit to cast one last look over his favourite view. About ten years ago a statue was erected to him here. But it was a great mistake not to have sculptured it after the expressive manner of the early Breton image-makers. Against the pedestal leans a pulpit, whence a priest is about to preach to the crowd. It will be

a regular "Sermon on the Mount" in the midst of a country equal in delicacy, and in sober harmony of contour, to the most beautiful spots in Galilee. While waiting for the sermon to begin, the pilgrims rest beneath the tents set up by neighbouring innkeepers, or lie tired out on the grass, drunk with the sunshine, but never ceasing their prayers. The sermon ended, they will reform the procession, and descend the other slope of the Ménez by the moorland paths I trod this morning, only reaching Locronan as the first stars are showing.

I cannot hear the preacher, but I have no difficulty in imagining the simple, moving things he finds to say in such a place, to such an audience, at this holy hour of sunset, so suitable for the setting forth of the legend of a country that has never lost her faith, even if to her eyes it is not all the truth. . . .

The banners, the crosses, are lying against the banks. . . . The Bay of Douarnenez stretches silent, pale in the evening light, striped with those blue-water marks that are the veins of the sea. Fantastic promontories rise crowding about the water, and grow little by little nearer to one another, like walls enclosing the horizon. Far-away songs, tinkling bells, announce that the pilgrims are once more on the march. And now all is still, even the wind. A great peace settles down with the coming of grey twilight. Shore, plain, valleys, die out, drowned in shadow. Only the great top of the sacred mountain rises clear above a bed of cloud, surrounded by a nimbus of dying light.



THE PROCESSION OF SAINTE ANNE DE LA PALUDE

BOOK V.—SAINTE ANNE DE LA PALUDE

THE PARDON OF THE SEA

DEDICATED TO ALEXANDRA VASSILIEVNA

CHAPTER I

THE first time I visited the sanctuary of La Palude was in winter. I travelled there from Châteaulin in the shabby hooded cart of a peasant. It was a grey, rainy afternoon, as melancholy as any dusk. The man who drove had a bearing much the same colour as the sky. All one could see of him was a huge hat with broken brims, and a checked farmer's coat, in which all his body was wrapped as though in a blanket. Neither going nor returning was I able to extract one word from him. To each of my questions he responded simply by a grunt. However, if he did not speak, he certainly whistled. The whole length of the journey he whistled without once leaving off, and always the same tune, some shepherd's song, despairingly monotonous. I still seem to be listening to it. A little Crozon girl, who was on her way back from Lourdes, shared the carriage with me. She was to get out somewhere in the neighbourhood of Ménez Hom. But she, too,

persisted in a grim silence, her face hidden under the hood of a thick black cloth mantle, and in her hands a chaplet of large beads (a souvenir of the south), which she told by dozens, with a constant, surreptitious movement. Over her thin lips prayers came silently wandering, and her eyes were kept lowered; no doubt to prevent the escape of those ecstatic visions she had gathered on her pilgrimage. Her narrow forehead, quite pure in shape, was bounded by the bar-like line of her eyebrows. I should have liked to have heard her account of the broad, melancholy country through which we were passing, unknown as it was to me, though to her its every detail must have been familiar. But I saw at once that she was one of those little savages of the Breton coast who look upon all men dressed in town garments, even though they speak the same language, as foreigners, suspicious characters. So I did not trouble to disturb her in her prayers. It was a curious journey; what the Bretons call, "A Journey through Purgatory," no doubt because of the ghostly aspect that all distant objects take under the lowering, troubled skies, drowned in cloud.

First we crossed a series of plains in a bare country, bristling here and there with sombre soot-coloured pines, last survivors of a long-vanished forest. To right and left lay the rounded backs of hills, like the immense tombs of some prehistoric age. I have since learned the names of these strange cairns; nearly every one is called after the name of some saint. Rising from their summits, or crouching on their flanks, are chapels, little, deserted, ruinous prayer-houses, where some old barbarous statue is enthroned, and where the bell only wakes up

once a year, to ring for a Low Mass on the day of the Pardon. If we are to believe the legend, Gildas himself had his cell on one of these heights—Gildas, the apostle of vehemence, the Jeremiah of the Breton emigration. It is said that his great shade prowls, restless, through this region, and that sometimes on tempestuous nights his angry voice may be heard mingling with the storm-wind.

At the inn of The Three Ducks the carriage stopped. We were at the foot of Ménez Hom. The Crozon girl got down, paid the man, and disappeared into a fold of the mountain, while we branched off toward the sea. We were now among wooded meadows, fields bordered by thick banks, above which from time to time the roof of a farm, surrounded by oak trees, rose ; but still the country was dumb and forsaken. We passed through two or three villages without seeing a soul, then once more the face of the country grew bare. There were more trees, but fewer signs of labour. A sharp breeze struck us in the face, flocks of white birds passed us, uttering strange cries, a kind of hoarse yelp ; then the sound of a strong, wild breathing arose, and through a hollow between the dunes I caught sight of the ocean. It seemed to have a narrow look, repulsive and foolish, threatening and tearful. "Are we there?" I asked the man, seeing him get down from his seat.

"Yes!" said he, shortly, without interrupting his whistling. And to tell the truth the road seemed to end there, before a ruined arch. Beyond, was a courtyard, at the end of which a very ancient manor-house was sinking into decay. It had all the appearance of being deserted. My entrance sent a crowd of chickens flying. The beaten earth was strewn with tools and

farm-implements of all kinds. I had to climb over a plough that was lying wrong side up; fishing-nets were hung up to dry on the teeth of a harrow along by the wall; and mattocks and quarry-men's picks were scattered among oars, pulleys, stumps of masts, remains of recent wreckage that still smelt of tar and salt. I imagined that I must have made a mistake, and have entered the barn instead of the dwelling, and I was going to turn back, when face to face with me, sprung from I know not where, I saw a little girl of some twelve years old, with a wan face and green, phosphorescent eyes, who, putting her finger on her lips, made a sign to me not to speak.

"My father is asleep," she murmured; "for God's sake take care not to wake him."

She pointed to a cupboard-bed at the other end of the room, the only good piece of furniture in the whole poor place. A human form was lying there, stiff as a corpse. A wet cloth covered his face, and the hands, that were stretched flat on the chaff mattress, were soiled with earth and mud.

"What is the matter with your father?"

"The day before yesterday, when he was coming from market, a little tipsy, I fancy, the waggon went over his body. Since then he has never ceased groaning day or night, except just now, when I put this linen on his face. This is the first time I have seen him get any rest at all."

"And you have not sent for the doctor?"

To this very natural question, the horrified girl replied by a start of dismay, and fixed her bright, wild-cat's eyes upon me.



PUTTING HER FINGERS TO HER LIPS SHE MADE A SIGN TO ME
NOT TO SPEAK

"We are in the country of Saint Anne, here," said she. "Why do you speak of a doctor? Is not the Mother of La Palude the most powerful of all healers? She will know perfectly well, without anybody's help, how to cure my father, who is her own farmer. Three times I have dipped that cloth in the sacred fountain, each time with a prayer, and you can see for yourself what good it has done. What need is there of any other medicine?"

For fear of disturbing the invalid she had not raised her voice, but it was vibrating with deep faith, and perhaps with a little irritation against myself, for she added, in a rather hostile tone—

"If you have come for the key you may as well go; the chapel is open."

As I went toward the chapel, I pictured to myself an ancient house of prayer, half hidden by the sand-dunes—one of those old oratories of which I had found so many along the coast between Douarnenez and Penmarc'h, low walled, with windows close to the ground, and massive roof, bomb-proof, so to speak, capable of braving the angry tumult of the winds for long centuries. It was quite a new church that I found! When I say new, I mean it had been lately rebuilt, for in Brittany everything grows to look old at once. The granite walls, soaked by the rain, had taken once more their old lava tints. The door was open, and I entered. A bare interior, no poetry, no mystery. Pale daylight, and the mournful cleanliness of a well-kept house, whose owner is almost always absent. Here and there stood modern statues, common and pretentious. After all the marvels that had been told me of this place of pilgrimage, I

could not help feeling a strong sense of disappointment. I was about to turn away, when a little tremulous cough made me look back, and I saw at the foot of a pillar on the south side a human figure, bent almost double. It was one of those poor old women whose type is fast disappearing, and who are now but rarely to be met with, save now and then, beside the sacred fountains. She was praying before an image that I had not perceived till then. On the pedestal was this inscription:—

“SAINTE ANNE, 1543.”

All kinds of extraordinary ex-voto offerings hung from, and leaned against, the wall—crutches, woollen epaulets, stained bits of linen, wax legs. . . .

I was struck by the resemblance between the suppliant and the saint, the one half petrified, the other stone. They had the same features, the same attitude, and in their faces there was the same hopelessness, the sign of sad resignation so distinctive of the old women of that neighbourhood. Their dress, also, was similar, grey hooded cloak and red-brown skirt, apron with a large bib pinned beneath the armpits. It was an opportunity for assuring myself that the local costume had varied little since the sixteenth century. And beside this, I had chanced on one of those curious instances, perhaps the most curious, of Breton art, where the image-maker, belonging to, and working among the peasant class, had chosen his models from his immediate surroundings. This explains the innocent realism of the greater number of the figures that they have left, the intensely lifelike effect they produce, the race-impress with which they are marked. This is



THE ANCIENT FIGURE OF SAINTE ANNE-DE-LA-PAULDE



CHATEAU MOELLIEN, THE REPUTED HOME OF SAINT ANNE.

why the heads of the Breton saints seem copies of those of the peasants, and that when we see one of the wandering singers outside the door of a chapel, we ask ourselves whether he is not one of the apostles come down from his pedestal in the porch.

The poor old woman got up at my approach, holding some birch twigs tied together with a bit of tough bark, with which she began carefully dusting the stone floor.

"Do you know," said I, "that you and Saint Anne are as alike as two sisters?"

"I am a grandmother, as she was," answered she; "and then, thank God, she was also a Breton."

"Saint Anne a Breton! Are you sure of that, my old godmother?"

She looked at me with her bright eyes through her long, grey lashes, and said, in a pitying tone:—

"It is very easy to see that you come from the town. Townspeople are always so ignorant; they despise us who live out here, because we do not know how to read their books; but as for themselves, what would they know about the country unless we were here to teach them? . . . Why yes, of course Saint Anne was a Breton. . . . Go to the Château Moëllien, and they will show you the room that she lived in when she was queen of this country. For she was a queen; she was even a duchess, and *that*, let me tell you, is a very grand title. They always used to bless her in the cottages, because of her bounty and her infinite compassion for the poor and miserable. Her husband, on the other hand, was a hard man. He was jealous of his wife, and did not wish her to have any children. When

he found that she was going to be a mother, he fell into a great passion, and drove her from his house one night in the middle of winter, as though she had been a beggar, so that it is a wonder that she did not die in the frozen rain.

"Homeless and miserable, she was wandering on straight before her, when in the Bay of Tréfentec, at the foot of this sand-hill, she saw a ship of light, lying quite quietly, though the sea was very stormy; and in the stern of the vessel stood a white angel, spreading his wings by way of sails.

"Said the angel to the saint: 'Make haste and come aboard, so that we may set sail, for the time is drawing nigh.'

"'Where are you going to take me?' asked she.

"'The wind will settle that. The Will of God is in the wind.'

"So they sailed away to the coast of Judæa, landing at the port of Jerusalem, and, a few days afterwards, Anne gave birth to a daughter, whom God intended to be the Virgin. Her mother brought her up piously, taught her her letters from a book of canticles, and trained her to be good in body and soul, so that she might be worthy of serving as the Mother of Jesus. Then, when her task was over, feeling herself growing old, she prayed to Heaven, saying:—

"'I am longing for my Breton people. Before I die let me see my parish, and the sea-beach of Plounévez-Porzay, that is so dear to my eyes!'

"Her wish was granted. The ship of light came back for her, with the same angel at the helm; only he was dressed in black, so as to show the saint that she was

now a widow, the Lord of Moëllien having died during her absence.

"The people of the castle had assembled on the shore to welcome their mistress with great demonstrations of joy, but she dismissed them at once.

"‘Go,’ said she ; ‘go and give all my goods to the poor !’

"She had made up her mind to finish her earthly days in poverty. And so after that, she lived here, on this bare sand-dune, in a state of continual prayer. The light of her eyes shone far over the waters like a ray of moonlight. On stormy evenings she was the safeguard of the fishers. With a gesture she would still the sea, and make the waves lie down in their beds like a flock of sheep in a stable.

"Jesus, her grandson, undertook the journey to Basse Bretagne on purpose to see her. He came with His disciples Peter and John to ask for her blessing before going to Calvary. The parting between them was very sad ; Anne wept tears of blood, and Jesus for some time was unable to console her. At last He said—

"‘Remember your Bretons, grandmother. Speak, and I will give them for your sake whatever blessing you like to ask.’

"Then the saint dried her tears. ‘Ah, well,’ said she, ‘let a church be consecrated to me on this spot. So far as its spire can be seen, and so far as its bell can be heard, may all sick bodies, all suffering souls, alive or dead, find peace !’

"‘It shall be as you wish,’ answered Jesus.

"Then, to lay greater stress on His promise, He

struck His walking-staff into the sand, and immediately, from the dry side of the sand-dune, a fountain sprang forth. It has been flowing ever since, inexhaustible ; whoever drinks with faith of that water feels a delicious freshness flow through his limbs and his heart becomes young once more.

“One evening there was great grief throughout the land. The sky was covered by a thick mist, the sea uttered sobs that were almost human. Saint Anne was dead. The women of the neighbourhood came in procession, with pieces of fine linen in which to shroud her. But in vain they sought her body ; they found no trace of it. There was great consternation, and the old people murmured sadly :—

“‘She has gone away for good and all. She has not even left her remains to our land ; surely it must be because some one has inadvertently failed in some way.’

“This thought saddened them greatly. Then suddenly the news spread that some fishermen had found in their nets a sculptured stone. When it was cleared from the mass of shells and seaweed that covered it, every one recognized the image of the saint. As at that time there was no chapel at La Palude, it was decided to take it to the church of the nearest town. For this purpose it was placed on a litter. It was so light that four children were able to carry it as far as the fountain, but they were not able to take it any further. The more they tried to lift it the heavier it became, and the old folks said—

“‘It is a sign ; we must build her house here.’

“There, my good gentleman ! that is the true history

of Anne de la Palude of Plounévez-Porzay. I learned it of my mother, who heard it from hers, at a time when such past events used to be piously handed down from memory to memory."

The good old creature, while talking, had been sweeping, gathering the dust together in little handfuls, and storing it in the corner of her apron. After having told me about the saint, she proceeded to speak of her own life, her long, monotonous, empty, silent, poverty-stricken life, bare as the sanctuary that she had just finished sweeping so carefully. It was terrible, it was tragic, because of its very simplicity. A brief joy here and there, one of those short-lived little flowers that in springtime star the grass of the dunes; then mourning again, death-knells; and over all the grinding of the ocean, as she crushes her victims down into the beach.

"I have no more sons, and my daughters-in-law are all dead or remarried. Sometimes I go and seat myself at a neighbour's fireside, but I am always ill at ease; their flame does not seem to warm me. Sometimes the kind excisemen will give me one of the low huts in which they shelter at night, when they are guarding the coast. And there I sleep on a bed of seaweed; but I am only really happy here. Every morning I go to the farm and ask for the key. I do the work of the sacristan; I sound the three Angelus bells; I receive the pilgrims and do the honours of the house; and they often ask me to recite for them special prayers, of which I alone know the secret. It is I who take them to the fountain and pour water into their hands, or over their breasts, according to the kind of illness they have. As soon as

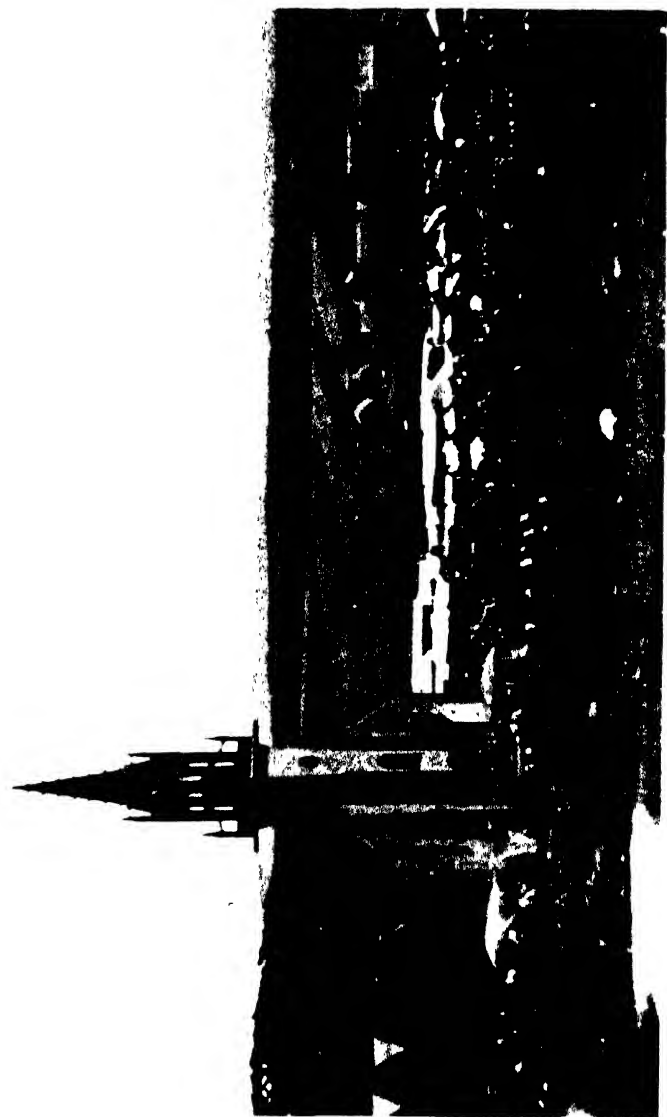
they start to come to the saint, I am warned by some special and supernatural sign. Sometimes it is the sound of a footstep in the empty church ; sometimes a cracking in the woodwork of the altar ; sometimes even, when it has to do with a great vow, light drops of sweat will gather on the forehead of the statue. Generally, however, nobody comes except on Tuesday, which is her special day. The rest of the week, the Mother of La Palude has nothing to look at save my poor old face, dilapidated as a ruined sea-wall. But she smiles at me, and shows herself pitiful and sweet toward me, so as to encourage me, and save me from the sorrows in which, except for her, I should sometimes be drowned. I do my best to keep her company. I talk to her, and it often seems to me that she answers. I sing her the songs that she loves and her canticle, which I think is the most beautiful there is in our language. And then I clean, I sprinkle, I sweep, I collect the dust, and give pinches of it to the pilgrims. Scattered over the land, it will hasten the crops and preserve the food of man and beast from damage."

I tried to slip a few pieces of money into her hand.

"The box is over there," said she ; "as for me, I am only a servant in this house ; I am not in a position to receive the offerings."

I was afraid I had offended her, but at my first word of excuse she interrupted me, and as I said good-bye, she replied heartily—

"Come back and see us again, my good gentleman. Only take care it is in summer, the last Sunday in August. Then you will see Saint Anne in all her glory.



THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT ANNE IN MONTREAL

No *fête* can be compared with that of the Palude, and those who have never taken part in it do not know what a Pardon really is. It is held in all the splendour of the blessed sun, amid the unrivalled wonders of the ocean."

CHAPTER II

I HAVE followed your advice, my good old friend. But alas! I have sought you in vain, both in the church, and on the top of the beach where you told me you lived. Vainly I inquired from the excisemen whom I found on guard; they were not those who treated you so kindly, and they did not remember to have ever seen you. Doubtless the "ship of light" came for you one evening, when the frozen rain was falling, and bore you away to that happy, peaceful shore, where some Saint Anne, perfect as she of whom you had so long dreamed, stood beckoning and awaiting you.

The humble soul had not exaggerated when she spoke of this Pardon as the most impressive and beautiful of all the Breton festivals.

It was a Saturday toward the end of August, the hour sunset. From the top of the rise at Tréfontec, the holy country lay in a warm brown glow. What a contrast to the desolate land I had just been traversing, pale, colourless, wrapped in a mist, through which it showed blurred and confused, like the phantom picture of a dead country, ghostland! Here, at this hour of evening, everything was breathing forth life; a fever of sound and excitement seemed to have taken possession of the desert. Even the dunes rejoiced, and the far



'PAYER LE DROIT DES PAUVRES'

reaches of the ocean flamed liked a great bonfire. Near by, where the stream of the miraculous fountain flowed, from a hollow in the hillside, a kind of nomad village, was growing up beneath our eyes.

Numberless tents, of every shape and colour, rose and grouped themselves together, their sides bulging with the wind, just as in those far-away days when the pastoral people—the Jules Bretons, as they are called—migrated thither. It made one think of some savage encampment, or of a party of emigrants just disembarked. In fact, many of the tents were supported with oars stuck in the ground, and consisted of sails, stamped in large black letters with their registered number, and the initial letter of their port. Round about this strange little town lay the turned-up carts, their wheels entangled, covering the plain with a bristling forest of shafts; while on the neighbouring grassland the horses roamed as they pleased.

And over it all spread a mighty clamour, a huge human buzzing, among which, now and again, mingled a regular musical note, the roaring cadence of the waves.

We had to make a circuit of the village in order to reach the church. A whole race of beggars were lying beneath the shadow of the elms in the graveyard. They no sooner perceived us, than they rushed upon us with the barks of howling dogs. Never have I seen such a number, not even at the Pardon of Saint Jean-du-Doigt, where they positively swarm. And never have I come across any quite so insolent. They did not ask for alms, they extorted them.

“Pay the right of the poor!” they cried.

And they rubbed their ulcers against us, and breathed in our faces with their horrible breath, smelling strongly of spirits. We were obliged to scatter several handfuls of sous among them before we could get rid of them. It astonished me that the clergy tolerated this rude and repulsive horde in the immediate neighbourhood of the chapel, till my companion, who was serving me also as guide, said :—

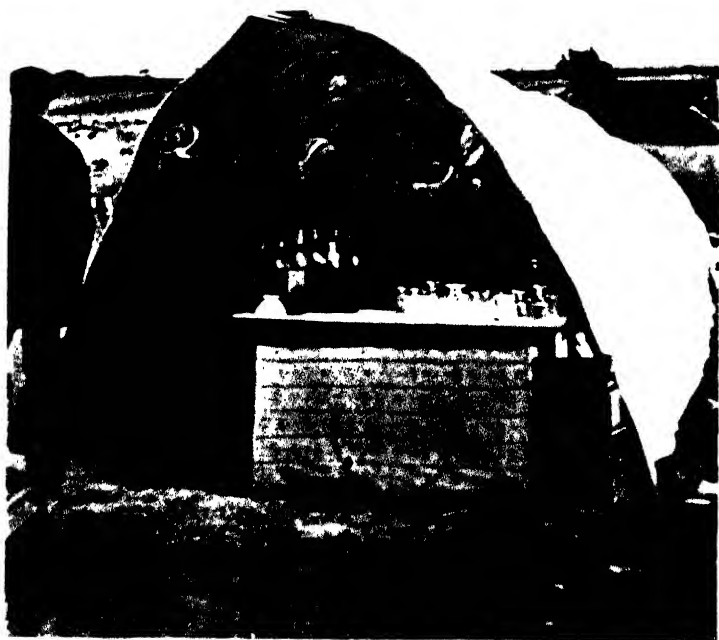
“They are a part of the original foundation. Ages ago, they had the title of Kings of La Palude. It was a passing royalty, however, for only Saturday ever belonged to them. They arrived this morning, nobody knows whence, and to-night they will disappear. They must finish their begging by then ; that is why they are so eager about it.”

“But if they chose to remain over to-morrow ? ”

“They would be violating the custom, and according to the old saying, custom is king over the king! . . . Besides, to-morrow the police will be here ; our beggars have a horror of those “spoil-sports,” the presence of a uniform is unbearable to them ; they much prefer to decamp. . . . And then the roads will be full of carriages ; it would not be safe for cripples. So prudence unites with custom in bidding the whole crew make off promptly. In a little while you may see for yourself that this night-exodus of ragged rascals is not without a certain charm.”

We had now crossed the sill of the church.

How restful it was after the tumult outside ! On the white walls hung garlands of ivy and holly. Symbolical anchors, trimmed with pine-branches, were set here and there ; miniature schooners, masterpieces of patience



A REFRESHMENT BOOTH AT LA PALUDE.

and delicate work, swayed in a mist of incense, and on her pedestal the saint, newly dressed for the occasion, seemed to have the youthful ways of a grandmother in holiday clothes. From time to time, a pilgrim would rise from among the congregation, approach the sacred image, and after prostrating himself on the floor, devoutly kiss the border of her robe. Mothers lifted their children in their upstretched arms toward the gentle stone figure. And the smell of burnt wax filled the air, and the fine blue smoke rose, rose. . . . Then little by little the church emptied. Only a few old widows in mourning-cloaks remained, telling their beads to an interminable prayer, sad as a lamentation. . . . It was supper-time, and night had fallen.

. . . A low, deep tent, half inn, half dormitory. People are snoring at one end, while at the other there is eating and drinking to the wavering light of a tallow candle. On the table are tin plates of swimming sausages; pitchers and mugs overflowing with greasy cider, very much mixed with water, and turned to vinegar by the heat; tiny charcoal stoves for lighting pipes, a big jar in which to wash one's hands. . . . We are here in the domain of Marie-Ange, a sprightly dame, angelic in nothing save her name. In the ordinary way she sells fish at Douarnenez in the market, and it is only now and then, under the most solemn circumstances, that she undertakes the duties of an innkeeper. But she fills the post to a marvel; lively, quick, with an eye for everything, and a word for every one, active of leg, and bold of speech.

The entrance of the tent, a flap of sailcloth fastened back with a rope by way of loop, looks out upon the

church, and further on, through a dip in the dunes, has a view of the serene tranquillity of the sea. A turf fire is burning a few steps off; in the open air above it the coffee of Marie-Ange is simmering in a caldron that rests on a bundle of faggots. Sparks are flying and glittering, lighting up little quick, short flames in the dry grass. To the right stands a dark mass, the silhouette of a circus; a bronze-coloured girl, leaning her elbows between the twisted columns of the balustrade, is gazing straight before her into space, while a deformed creature nails to the front of the waggon this amazing notice—

“Qu'éhern O'Michel tells fortunes. Certain to be fulfilled. Undertakes the cure of boils.”

The night is still, peaceful, bathed in clear moonlight that seems to fall in drops towards the east. Only the breathing of the waves can be heard through the silence that has followed the tumult of the day. The sky curves in a great dome, like the roof of a mighty temple, and, involuntarily, one lowers the voice in speaking, out of respect to a certain divine something that roams through the silent majesty. Suddenly a song breaks forth, a slow, hoarse rhapsody, that sounds as though hurled forth by a choir of drunkards—

“Enn eskopti a Gerné, war vordik ar môr glaz. . . .” *

It is the beggars dispersing. A fantastic and ghastly procession! They pass by in a crowd, pell-mell, shouting with their half-drunken voices the praises

* “On the edge of the blue sea, in the bishopric of Cornouailles. . . .”

of La Palude and the merits of the saint, true grandmother of the Saviour.

“Par qui la rose a fleuri où ne poussait que l'épine.”*

More than one tipsy fellow sings as though in a dream. Many of the women are carrying babies in their arms, fatherless little ones, born anywhere along the roads. The blind pass, with their hesitating, sleep-walking gait, each face turned toward the sky, each hand grasping a staff like a shepherd's crook, made from the stem of a young sapling.

Bodies of men swing backwards and forwards between crutches, like bells in their gables. The procession is closed by an idiot, a tall boy with a vacant face, who, seen but vaguely in the half-light, looks in his grey gown like some monk. The people take off their hats and cross themselves as he passes, for does not the Spirit of God dwell in the soul of the simple? With a gracious air, Marie-Ange offers him a glass of cider; but he is not thirsty, as the old woman who leads him by a leash explains. And so he disappears with the others round the side of the dune into the night. One of the pilgrims whispers in my ear:—

“Saint Anne is particularly fond of that idiot. About six years ago he fell ill, some leagues from here, near by the Mountains of Aré, and could not get to La Palude for the Pardon. The festival was completely spoilt. From Friday morning till Monday evening it poured in torrents. Ah, the blessing of Heaven is always over these ‘Innocents.’”

* “From whom a rose flowered where only a thorn budded.”

Silence is reigning once more, save now and then, when some horse that has wandered away neighs to his companions ; and always, always, there is the sound of the slumbering sea, calm as the breath of a sleeping child.

We have come down the steep paths that lead to the beach. In the crannies of the rock couples are sitting, young men and young girls ; the latter, sardine-workers from the Isle of Tristan, from Douarnenez and Tréboul, perhaps even from Audierne and Saint Guennolé ; the latter, blue-jackets from Brest, who have got permission to come to the Pardon to kiss their "friends," their sweethearts—to hold one sad, supreme vigil of love before starting on their next voyage. Like all grandmothers, Saint Anne is indulgent towards them. She is not shocked by these nocturnal meetings ; on the contrary, she favours them, stretching the velvety canopy of her sky, all spangled with stars, over their heads ; lending them her soft, rounded dune, the quiet corners of her grottoes, carpeted with seaweed ; shelters them with mystery, peace, and poetry. She knows the hereditary chastity of their race, and that in their eyes love is a form of religion. It is true that Marie-Ange tells us the story* of a "Capenn," a daughter of Cap-Sizun, "qui attrapa au Pardon de la Palude, une maladie de trente-six Jeudis !" But you hear of such things just because they are so extremely rare. The couples whom we have disturbed are holding one another by the hand, without a word, absorbed in silent contemplation, their souls conversing with one another. And truly, their thoughts appear more solemn than wanton. They make

me think of two lines of a song I once heard at Paimpol—

“Rôpeuc’h rô peuc’h, mestrezik flour !
Me wél ma maro ’bars an dour. . . .” *

There is always something tragic about a sailor’s betrothal, and the vows he exchanges with his love are more often than not sad as farewells. . . .

And now a whistle informs us that the *Glaneuse* is about to make a halt. Generally this little coasting-steamer crosses the bay in a straight line, from Morgat to Douarnenez ; but, during the Pardon, it stops at La Palude.

We found about twenty passengers on board, almost all fishermen belonging to the bay. The peasants, going as well as coming, prefer the land route. However, there was one old man from Ploaré, with his wife ; and my companion, who knew him, spoke to him about the journey—

“Hello, old Tymeur ! So you are not afraid to trust yourself on the fishes’ road ? . . . Is this some vow that you have made, or are your legs no longer able to carry you ? ”

“Neither the one nor the other,” answered the old man, coming up to us, glad to have some one to talk to during the passage. “Thank God, our legs are as firm as ever, and as to our vow, Renée-Jeanne and I have seen to that most carefully last evening, as befits good Christians.”

“Then I suppose you have forgiven the sea ? ”

* “Be still ! be still, sweet mistress !
I see my death in the sea. . . .”

"No, no! I shall owe her a grudge as long as I live. She took our son Yvon, God rest his soul! Such things can never be forgiven. The sea! Neither Renée-Jeanne nor I can bear the smell of her! One of our windows looked out over the sea. We have had it built up. The land is the true mother of men; the sea is only their cruel step-mother. If I were Saint Anne, I would dry the whole sea up in a single night."

"Yes, yes, Tymeur; but that does not explain to us." . . .

"Ah no, that is true. Well, after all, I don't know that there is any harm in telling you. Nothing comes without God's permission; does it, Renée-Jeanne?"

Renée-Jeanne, crouching on a heap of ropes, was murmuring a set of strange prayers—charms, no doubt, against the evil spirits that infest the waters. She waved her hand vaguely, and old Father Tymeur, after assuring himself that we could not be overheard, began his story.

It happened thus. The year before, on the same day, and at the same hour, he and Renée-Jeanne were returning towards Ploaré along the road. A little before Kerlaz, on the right-hand side, stands the chapel of La Clarté, where the pilgrims from La Palude generally make a halt and recite a prayer, because Our Lady of La Clarté is supposed to be the eldest daughter of Saint Anne, just as Our Lady of Kerlaz is her second daughter. Our friends were just about to cross the steps leading to the graveyard, when, by the light of the moon, they perceived a man seated among the grass on

a long box made of loose planks. He seemed dreadfully worn out, for the sweat poured from his bare forehead and ran out between his extremely thin fingers. Tymeur hailed him, and said pityingly—

"You seem very much exhausted, my poor 'God-father.'"

"Ah yes; indeed, the burden I have to carry is so heavy. . . . Is it much further to La Palude?" asked the wretched man, in a sad voice.

"About three-quarters of a league. My wife and I would like to help you, if you will tell us something that we can do. Is there anything?"

"Indeed there is much." . . .

"Well, tell me."

"Say a Mass in your parish church for the repose of a soul in trouble, for an Anaon. . . . In exchange," continued the dead man—for it was one—"I will give you a piece of advice. . . . If ever you undertake to go on a pilgrimage in the name of any friend, keep your promise faithfully during your lifetime. If you do not, it will haunt you after death, as mine does. I undertook to go to La Palude for this man who is here beneath me in the box. But life is so short, and there are such numbers of things to remember. Unfortunately, I forgot the most important, and now I am reaping my punishment. For more years than I can count I have been journeying towards Saint Anne. Each Pardon only brings me nearer by the length of the coffin. Ah, and if you only knew how heavy the corpse of a deceived friend weighs! . . . By saying that Mass for me you will shorten my journey by a great many lengths."

At these words he disappeared, and Tymeur and his

wife went and knelt down under the porch and remained there in prayer until dawn, stopping up their ears so as not to hear the dead man panting under the weight of bones and mouldy planks. After a pause, the old man concluded thus—

“One does not expose one’s self twice to such meetings as that ; does one, Renée-Jeanne ?”

Renée-Jeanne had drawn her white cloth hood, with its broad band of black velvet, over her face, and turned her back obstinately to the sea. . . . But this did not render it any the less beautiful to watch on that lovely August night. The air was warm, and perfumed with a strange scent, as though the exquisite flowers of the gardens of Ker-Is had all at once awaked from their enchanted sleep and were spreading their fragrance over the surface of the waters. It lay there almost at our feet, this fairy city of legend. Now and then, in the hollow between two waves, one almost fancied that it could still be seen, that its voices and noises could be heard. The phosphorescent lights that glowed on the crests of the waves seemed the illuminations of a city keeping holiday. We slipped past towering cliffs and tall stone skeleton, enigmatical faces, who for centuries had been watching some sight beneath the water, seen only to themselves. And the sky above our heads was like another ocean, where among the sparkling stars a crescent moon lay floating.

CHAPTER III

THE next morning, Sunday, the sun rose on the Great Day. Once more I can see Douarnenez setting forth in a crowd towards La Palude. All the conveyances of the country have been put in requisition, and are taken by assault. Between the crowded seats extra stools are placed, borrowed from the neighbouring inn. The driver seats himself in front, outside, a foot on each shaft; the many-coloured shawls of the girls seated behind sweep the pavement with their fringes; and the char-à-bancs roll heavily away at the slow pace of the Cornouailles cob, who seems very philosophical, and no longer surprised at anything. The men are gorgeous in their new jackets, their caps pulled well down over their eyes. They wave their arms, they shout, partly because they feel they must, and partly because they are so happy; just to prove to themselves that they are not in their boats, where the least movement must be measured, restrained, calculated, under pain of death; and also to exorcise their souls, as they will tell you, from the great stillness of the sea, even more haunting than its anger. These occasional loosening of their constrained nerves and muscles are positively necessary to them. The Pardon of Saint Anne is one of the safety-valves through which these rough

creatures blow off the superfluous steam of their repressed spirits. I have heard grave, respectable people and officials reproach them for the almost brutal impetuosity with which they rush to any merry-making. And it is true; they fling themselves at it, head lowered, joyous, heedless, wasteful, scattering the savings of weeks, or months. In matters of domestic economy they are still in a state of savagery. Let others blame them! As for myself, I have seen them at work in their fishing-boats during stormy nights at sea, and when I remember that life of the damned which they lead, ever the prey of a toil whose ingratitude has no equal, save their patience, I am tempted rather to think that these short intervals, during which God snatches them from hell, are but too short.

All the life of the port has retreated to the upper town. The quays are deserted. The fishing-boats, drawn up on the sand, lie side by side in abandoned attitudes, glad of this twenty-four hours' respite. They are so tired, and it is so pleasant even for the boats to have one day in which they may lie and dream in peace! The nets are hanging in the sun, fastened to the masts. And the tide is low, the bay is empty, for as far as the eye can reach; only towards the north rise the white cliffs of Morgat, and the stone needles of the Cape of the Goat.

I was anxious to go to La Palude by the pilgrim path. The line of pilgrims enter the woods of Plomarc'h. Mysterious pools are sleeping under the beech trees. Hither the daughter of Gralon, Ahès, or, as she is sometimes called, Dahut, used to come with her companions, the fair-haired girls of Ker-Is, to wash her royal linen.



THE SARDINE BOATS OF DOUARNENEZ

They say that the water of these fountains has kept her image, and the mosses on their banks the sweet scent of her hair. Through the network of branches sparkles the sea. It scarcely leaves us throughout the journey, always adorable, never the same ; spreading, in her coquettish way, numberless charms before our eyes, and the infinite grace of her everlasting allurements. It is *her* festival—do not forget that—*her fête*, as well as that of Saint Anne, that these Bretons of the coast of Cornouailles are celebrating to-day. In ancient times, when yet the grandmother of Jesus was not born, *she* was the only idol in these parts. She had no chapel among the dunes ; the ceremonies of her worship were performed in the open air. But people ran thither in crowds, just as they do now, and the time of year was the same, the hot month of August, because then the goddess revealed herself in all her glorious beauty, unveiling her loveliness, her pearly, transparent flesh quivering beneath the caresses of the light before the ravished gaze of her worshippers. Then her pilgrims, assembled on the heights, would stretch their arms toward her, sing hymns in praise of her, lose themselves in the contemplation of her charms. There is no doubt that Ahès, or Dahut, was one of the names by which this goddess was invoked ; but what particular kind of incantation was associated with this name we shall probably never know.

At all events, the myth has survived, and its earlier meaning shows plainly through all the retouching it has undergone at the hands of Christianity. Ahès had an undulating way of moving, long floating hair, sometimes the colour of the sun, sometimes of the moon ; her eyes

were changeful and fascinating. She lived in an immense palace, whose windows shone like great emeralds. She was subject to violent passions, an insatiable rage for love. She preferred the men of the people, strong, rough lads. If a fisher, with his nets over his shoulder, passed the window of her chamber, she would make him a sign to enter. Many times during one night, would she change her lover, and she would dance naked before them, twine her arms around them, and sing them to sleep, so that they never woke again. For her kisses were fatal. The lips upon which she placed her own remained open for ever. She was a devourer of souls. Any one of her caprices was sufficient to cause the most terrible disaster, to efface a whole city from the map of the world in the winking of an eye. She was adored, yet hated. She was irresistible, and fatal. Who does not recognize in her the living personification of the sea?

On the beach of the Ris the pilgrims stop to take off their shoes. The tide is ebbing. The dazzling white sands are glittering, all spangled with mica; there is nearly a mile of this shore altogether. It is delightful to put one's foot on the level ground, fine grained and polished like a floor of marble. Beneath the pressure unseen waters well forth. The great ragged shadows of cliffs form a shelter from the heat of the sun, and from the caverns that the waves have burrowed in the slaty rock a damp breath issues, fanning the hot face of the passer-by. Flocks of sea-mews and gulls, their wide-spread wings tipped with rosy light, float motionless in the air.

A bay, a field, some dry, almost precipitous



ON THE BEACH THE PILGRIMS STOP TO TAKE OFF THEIR SHOES. THE TIDE IS FEBBING

moorland. We are following the land path once more, but across a mournful country, under an overwhelmingly hot sky. No shelter, not a tree! At most an unexpected coombe, a group of rickety willows over a dried-up fountain. Then, again, monstrous rocks overhanging the abyss. The path clings to their sides, or wanders about in their crannies. And down below that traitress, the sea, watches the passer-by.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" cries a voice behind me, a panting woman's voice, speaking in Breton.

It is an "Islienne" from Sein who is calling, a widow apparently, judging from her black cap and the severe simplicity of the rest of her dress.

"Excuse me, monsieur, but may I ask you to let me walk with you along this piece of the road? I should never have the courage to go alone."

"The safest way for you, if you are afraid of turning giddy, is to make a detour."

"Ah, but you see I cannot do that. This is the path of my vow!"

So this dangerous path is sacred to her, and as we go she tells me why.

Twenty years ago she was making her way towards La Palude with her future husband. Their wedding was fixed for the next week, and they were going, she to ask the saint to bless their marriage, he to thank her for saving his life during the previous winter, when for a whole night he had been in danger in the bay.

They had just been talking of the terrors they had both endured during that fearful night.

"Yes," exclaimed the young man, "I was very

nearly wedding the sea instead of you . . . She is looking pretty enough now, the jade," added he, bending over the water that lay softly undulating, clear and deep, at the foot of the rock:

But he had scarcely done speaking when he suddenly threw himself backward. He had turned quite livid.

"Oh, how unfortunate!" he cried; "a dead wave!"

A kind of bellowing came up out of the gulf, and a liquid mass, in the rough form of a beast, sprang . . .

When the Islienne, who had fainted, reopened her eyes, a group of pilgrims knelt around her, praying, thinking that she was dead.

"And Kaour?" she asked, as soon as she had regained her senses; "where is Kaour?"

But no one could give her any news of her lover. The sea had a calm, innocent manner, as though nothing had happened. They searched for the body, but no one ever found it.

Ever afterwards the poor girl went every year to the Pardon of La Palude, and always by the path they had trodden so gaily together that day. But when she came to the dreadful place her strength would fail her. She was afraid of hearing the voice of Kaour calling to her; but, on the other hand, she was determined to show him that she remained faithful to his memory.

"I am his widow," said she, "for our banns had been published. In the Island it is sacrilege to marry a second time."

Talking of these sad things, we came down towards the Bay of Tréfentec. Before reaching the first dunes of Saint Anne there was still a bare stretch of country to cross. The heat was exhausting, and I was very

thirsty. The woman would have liked a drink too. Suddenly she saw a boat lying on the sand. To run to it and climb aboard was the work of a moment ; and there she was, standing and calling to me, an earthen pitcher in her hands. While I quenched my thirst, she remarked, in a joyous tone :—

“It is service for service, isn't it? Now we shall be quits.” And as I complimented her on her sharpness, “Oh, I only had to think of the proverb that says, ‘A sailor never goes to sea without water.’” . . .

Never did I taste anything more delicious. No doubt when the pilgrims belonging to that boat set sail in the evening, they were rather surprised to find the pitcher half empty ; but, as my accomplice said, they would by that time have had so much to drink that they would never notice.

And really, when we arrived at La Palude, the tents were overflowing with drinkers ; even the women sat sipping “Breton champagne,” a kind of gaseous lemonade, saturated with alcohol. The hollow among the dunes looked like an immense fair, one of those fairs of the Middle Ages where all costumes and speeches were mingled. The smoke of the bivouac fires curled slowly up into the still air.* The dust blew about in great copper-coloured clouds. It seemed as though the white tents were floating on a vast human ocean. Suddenly, in the midst of this sea of sound and colour, noise and confusion, where the jokes of mountebanks made a chorus to the singing of hymns, we came upon the fountain, lying surrounded by the coarse, excited, popular merry-making, like an oasis of silence, an island of peace. It has a parapet to protect it, and a granite

pavement surrounds it. In the centre rises the statue of the saint. Some old women of the neighbourhood were standing on the steps, with bowls and pitchers, to assist the devotees in their ablutions.

A woman of Penmarc'h or Loctudy, a Bigoudenn, had just crossed the steps, with a faltering gait. She had an earthy face like a mummy, framed in her narrow cap embroidered with pearls and shaped like a mitre; her heavy skirts, arranged in three rows, one above another, weighed down her thin, feeble legs, and one trembled lest she should sink, suddenly, between the arms of the two young men, her sons, who led her, stiff and silent.

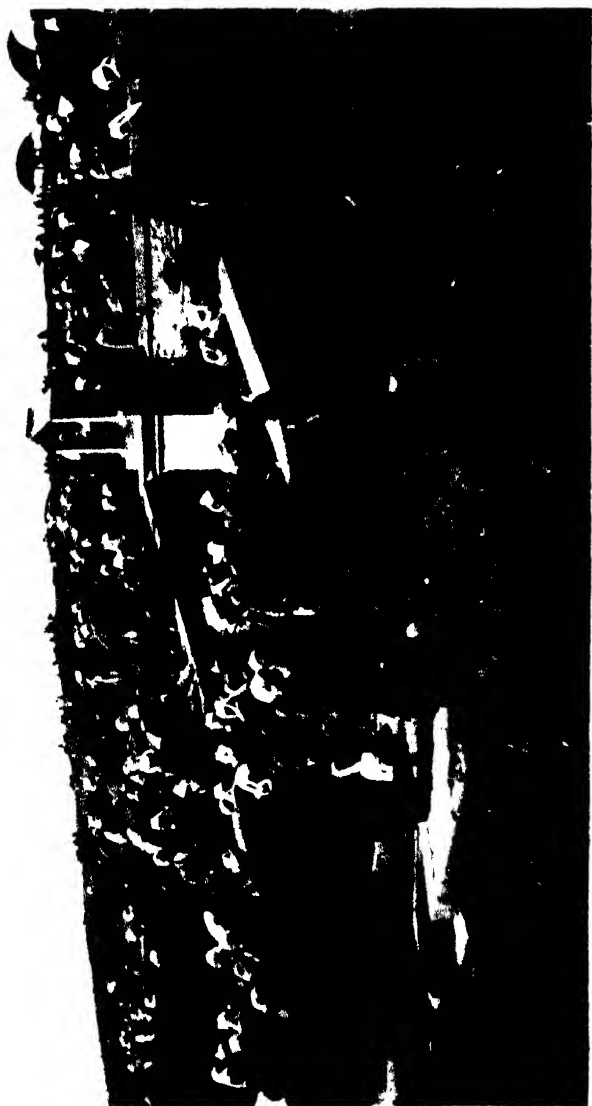
The old assistants pressed around her, offering their services with whisperings of compassion, kindly inquiring the nature of her complaint. She, however, completely exhausted, let herself drop on the stone bench at the foot of the saint's pedestal, and with her thin fingers began to unfasten, one by one, the different portions of her clothing; first her velvet braided bodice, then the brown woollen camisole, and lastly an unbleached chemise, uncovering her breast, where, covered with strips of lint, appeared the horrible wound of a cancer.

The two young men watched her, hat in hand, as though they were in church, and I overheard one of them, the elder, explain to the old women—

“We have taken her to all the best-known places in the neighbourhood of our parish, to Saint Nonna of Penmarc'h, to Saint Tuvé of Kérity, to Saint Trémur of Plobannalec. But every time she has come back in greater pain. And now some one has told us that only Saint Anne can cure her, so we have come to her.”

Then the old women began to cry out: “Oh, what a

THE FOUNT OF SAINTE ANNE DE LA PALUDE



pity you did not think of it sooner ! . . . Saint Anne is the only one, you see ! . . . Saint Anne is the only one who can help you. . . . There is no one besides Saint Anne, any one will tell you that. . . . If you had been anything but a seaweed-burner, you would have known it."

All the while they were scolding the sons they were busying themselves about the mother, performing all the usual rites in her name. One bathed her face with water ; another poured some up her sleeves, so as to wet the whole length of her arms ; a third took her handkerchief out of her pocket, and dipping it in the fountain, laid it, wet, on the sore place ; while others fell down on their knees on the muddy stones, calling upon the patroness of La Palude, "Grandmother of Sorrow," Mother of Mothers, Fountain of Health, Rose of the Dunes, Hope of Breton people.

These improvised prayers were very sweet and soothing.

The sick woman made herself repeat the phrases, her head turned back, her eyes raised toward the figure of the saint, statuesque in her trouble and supplication.

I have often heard people remark on the way that everything in Brittany, bits of landscapes, groups of men and women, form pictures. Effects come about quite spontaneously by some kind of instinct, and the artist has only to copy, almost without alteration.

Looked at from this point of view, the procession of La Palude is a marvel ; there is no other word to describe it. It is impossible to conceive anything more complete, a vision of art more intense, more changeful and harmonious.

A sky like that of some old master, powdered with a golden mist. . . . The light church, with its lilac tones, aerial, quivering; all the bells ringing tumultuously overhead. . . . Here and there pale, faded greens, the grey of the tents, the pink-brown of the cliffs, and in front the splendid basin of the bay, its great calm stretches of blue, the carved fretting of its promontories, the supple, changing festoon of its breakers, embroidered with foam and sunshine. There is a scene!

On to this fair background comes a fairy procession, a long, noble train of serious figures—serious, gorgeous, ecclesiastical—escaped, it would seem, from some stained-glass window. It makes one think of a company of living idols, overladen with heavy ornaments and sparkling embroideries. Nowhere else does one see such rich and splendid costumes, save, perhaps, in Croatia, in Ukraina, or in some Eastern land. Every family carefully preserves its costume in a special cupboard that is only opened once a year for the "Sunday of Saint Anne." On that day it is worn by the eldest daughter, or by the daughter-in-law. All the family is present at her toilet, and give her most minute instructions. The grandmother, the depository of the ancient traditions, is lavish with advice, rearranges the drapery, corrects the deportment of the novice, teaches her to walk as she should, with a solemn step, an almost priestly manner.

The sight of these women in their magnificent dresses, moving majestically along through this glittering scene, among the chant of litanies and the muffled sound of drums, is really one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen, and something that can never be forgotten.

It makes one think of some huge painting, which, when unrolled, shows in all the pomp of mystic barbarism a band of priestesses belonging to the Old Ocean.

For a long time afterwards one is haunted by thoughts of past ages. But then follows something that brings us back to painful and eternal reality.

Old or young, graceful or bent, the widows of the sea come out from the porch. The eye is weary with trying to count them ; there are so many. They have put out their candles, to signify that the lives of the men they loved are in like manner extinguished. For the most part the faces are stamped with placid resignation. The most sorrowful hide their tears beneath the limp-hanging folds of the grey hood they all wear. They pass quietly, with joined hands, followed immediately by the "Saved."

This arrangement is not so ironical as it seems. How many of these "Saved" of to-day will not be mourned among the "Lost" at the next Pardon? By a feeling of touching delicacy they are dressed for the occasion in the clothes they wore on the day of the shipwreck, at the very moment when the saint came to their aid and stilled the tempest for them. They are in the clothes in which they struggle with their pitiless work. Trousers turned up over woollen drawers, blue cloth jacket, worn, ragged, discoloured by spray, spotted with drops of tar, the saffron-coloured net thrown across the shoulders. In years gone by they went to such a length of realism that they used to dip themselves in the sea after they had dressed, and take part in the procession all dripping with sea-water.

Amongst them appears the complete model of a

ship. The cabin-boy marches at their head. From his neck a half-decayed bit of writing hangs, the sailing orders, the only thing recovered from the storm. All these men are singing aloud. But, in spite of their light-heartedness, increased during the morning by liberal libations, they look serious, almost sad.

"How can we help it?" said one of them to me. "The Blessed Saint Anne does her very best for us, and we thank her with all our hearts. But while we are shouting our praises to her we can hear the other laughing, down there, all the time. . . . And you know when she has let you go once, twice, take care of the third time! It is not a safe thing to trick the sea."

. . . Evening is falling. The crosses and banners are passing back into the church, and everything begins to break up immediately. The carts are set up and begin to move, the horses, who are well rested, starting at a quick trot. Torrents of pilgrims flow out in every direction. For a long distance the eye can follow these thin, winding, many-coloured lines, making their way across the fields, and scattering little by little, to disappear at last in the shadowy distance.

The sails that served to cover the tents slip to the ground. Marie-Ange, very busy, cries to me—

"We are just going to take up the anchor and set sail."

Over the empty plain a mantle of solitude falls with the night. The travelling-vans of the mountebanks and hawkers again show their silhouettes, like wandering Noah's Arks; to-morrow they too will have fled. And

La Palude, under the first breath of autumn, begins to look like the mournful country I remember it—solitary, save for a disused house of prayer and a farm in ruins, standing face to face with the hostile sea, as wild, as untamed as ever.

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